

WORKING AND THINKING ACROSS DIFFERENCE: A WHITE SOCIAL WORKER
AND AN INDIGENOUS WORLD

WORKING AND THINKING ACROSS DIFFERENCE: A WHITE SOCIAL
WORKER AND AN INDIGENOUS WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous populations have experienced vast travesties due to the impacts of colonialism. Colonialism continues to be perpetuated through the services, programs and policies that Indigenous people encounter. This research thesis tackles the question of how non-Indigenous social workers, professionals and interested parties can work with Indigenous people in appropriate and respectful ways. It also reviews how non-Indigenous people can work and think across difference. This research represents my journey towards decolonizing myself to find new ways of being White that are compatible with Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing. Autoethnography, relevant literature and interviews were used to explore ways of working with Indigenous populations. Three participants who had been identified by an Indigenous academic as people who had worked with Indigenous populations in appropriate and respectful ways were interviewed in Canada. An analysis of the three semi in-depth interviews produced several recommendations for non-Indigenous people in working with Indigenous populations. Results acknowledge the complexity of working and thinking across difference. Suggestions for working with Indigenous populations are highlighted and include such themes as acknowledging tensions and privilege, understanding that there is a large diversity within Indigenous populations, recognizing that there are aspects of dominant ways of knowing that are compatible with Indigenous ways of knowing, the importance of not being afraid to take risks and of trying not to make assumptions. Decolonization is an uneasy pursuit that is fraught with tension and this research hopes to

encourage other social workers, professionals and interested parties to engage in similar processes.

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Discovering the Journey

For the most part, Indigenous people, groups and communities have not been serviced in the social work field in appropriate and respectful ways. This is primarily due to the disparities that exist between Indigenous and more dominant frameworks. These disparities can be found within the different worldviews, epistemologies, knowledge systems and ways of knowing that accompany each of these frameworks. Oftentimes, non-Indigenous people are unequipped in the provision of service delivery to Indigenous populations. This is most likely due to the assumption that the dominant social work framework can be applied to everyone regardless of any differences that may or may not exist.

The journey that I would like to embark on involves exploring appropriate and respectful ways that non-Indigenous social workers, professionals and interested parties can learn to work with Indigenous populations. This requires an understanding of the differences that exist between Indigenous and dominant worldviews, knowledge systems and ways of knowing. In reviewing these differences, I will explore non-Indigenous ways of being that are compatible with Indigenous ways of knowing so that I can learn to work and think across difference in ways that are appropriate for Indigenous populations.

Throughout Canadian history, Indigenous people have been colonized at the hands of European descendents. Colonialism can be defined as the “dehumanizing process in imperialism where those ‘new lands’ and inhabitants were considered subjects

of the Crown” (Vickers, 2002, p. 242). Europeans have colonized Indigenous populations through acts of domination, coercion, dependence and exploitation (D’Souza, 1994). Since the arrival of Europeans to Canada, efforts have been made to assimilate Indigenous people into the dominant European culture. The rationale behind these attempts remains contested. Some believe that Europeans attempted to do so because they believed that “assimilation” was in the best interests of Indigenous people, whereas others believe that Europeans only took their own needs into consideration. Regardless, this colonialism has caused generations of Indigenous people to suffer because of the destruction and decay of Indigenous people, culture and history (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 2004).

The historical violence and oppression that have transpired due to forced assimilation has been shown to be inextricably linked to the higher rates of suicide, homicide, sexual abuse, mental health issues and drug and alcohol addiction that Indigenous people continue to encounter today (Aguilera & Plasencia, 2005). Colonization continues to impact Indigenous communities as colonial ideologies inform current services that pertain to Indigenous families, health, social programming, justice, education, research and ways of life (RCAP, 2004; Vickers, 2002). As a result, social injustices still pervade because of the domination of Euro-Western culture.

In North America and in many other parts of the world, Whiteness seems to be the norm that other ethnicities or cultures are consistently measured against (Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson & Sookraj, 2009). Further, it has been identified that “Current anthropological examinations of race now acknowledge the centrality of whiteness as an

ideological pivot, the usually unmarked term in a series of hierarchically arranged racialized binaries such as white/black, white/Indian, Anglo/Latino, and Westerner/indigenous” (Trechter and Bucholtz, 2001, p. 4). Racialized binaries often translate into the misconception that other less dominant ethnicities should conform to the dominant culture. As a result, the areas of knowledge, research and education in North America are currently dominated by notions of colonialism and White culture (Baskin, Koleszar-Green, Hendry, Lavallée, & Murrin, 2008; Blodgett, Schinke, Peltier, Fisher, Watson, & Wabano, 2011; Davis, 2004; Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Evans et al., 2009; Getty, 2010; Lynn, 2001; Regan, 2010; Vickers, 2002). Further, Razack (2009, p.13) argues that “the colonizer and the colonized come together for teaching and learning” within this academic space. Due to this domination, Indigenous people continue to be colonized through the process of attending school and learning academic knowledge that is valued and informed by Euro-Western principles.

Indigenous educators working within mainstream academia believe that the current academic paradigm is “contributing to neo-colonial practices that suppress Aboriginal student identity” (Cherubini, Niemczyk, Hodson, & McGean, 2010, p. 551). This is problematic as Euro-Western knowledge systems and ways of knowing are not always compatible with Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing. As a result, this incongruity exposes Indigenous people to the oppressive structures that exist within our education system (Vickers, 2002). Indigenous knowledge is not being properly represented because the Euro-Western research paradigm leaves little space for other research paradigms to co-exist (Getty, 2010). This can be extremely frustrating for

Indigenous students who are exposed to knowledge that is in direct contrast to or is incompatible with their personal experiences and memories (Baskin et al., 2008).

According to an Indigenous academic, education has been their enemy and has existed as a “major arm of colonialism” (Baskin, 2003, p. 172). Another Indigenous academic has asserted that the Canadian education system continues to perpetuate the assumption that European and Euro-Canadian knowledge is more dominant than other knowledge systems (Victor, 2007). Paulo Friere (1970) believed that oppression existed within the current academic paradigm and he worked towards disrupting this by creating pedagogy informed by populations who had shared experiences of oppression and colonialism. Today, many other researchers and academics are coming forward to include the perspective of the oppressed within emerging pedagogies. This highlights a communal interest in formulating pedagogy that is relevant for populations who may not adhere or identify with the dominant framework.

According to Vickers (2002), the mainstream approach to knowledge, research and education reinforces colonialism by leading non-Indigenous people to develop and maintain a “colonial mind”. This author describes this “colonial mind” as a mind that is “based upon historic and Eurocentric beliefs of superiority that subjugated First Nations people and made them wards of the government” (p. 242). Non-Indigenous people who have become colonized or are colonizers themselves need to understand the impacts of colonialism in order to be aware of the impacts they have in today’s society. This requires non-Indigenous people to pursue the undoing of their “colonial mind” (Vickers, 2002).

In regards to my research, I am aware that my exposure to Indigenous knowledge and culture has been limited. Similar to other non-Indigenous researchers, I have not been educated in a way that was inclusive of Indigenous identity and concerns. Academically, I have been given what I would deem to be a misinformed account of “Canadian” history as it has been permeated by a White, Euro-Western framework. I have had to seek out education on colonization and Indigenous issues in my own personal pursuits. In these pursuits, it appears that education on colonization often occurs far too late in life for people who have been exposed to it (Baskin et al., 2008). According to my personal experience, most people who become educated on colonialism have sought this out for themselves rather than having been exposed to it via formalized academic curricula. This suggests that there are many other non-Indigenous people who remain uninformed and are unaware of colonialism.

There is an abundance of research available on colonization and how it has specifically impacted Indigenous people. However, Indigenous populations have often been researched by non-Indigenous researchers in a way that further reinforces colonialism (Blodgett et al., 2011). Indigenous researchers are fighting to reclaim the research that is conducted on Indigenous populations. Reclamation of the research and educational space could help represent Indigenous knowledge in ways that provide meaning for Indigenous populations within their own contexts. I believe that this requires the emergence of an alternative perspective to the current dominant academic and research paradigm. Space needs to be made in the dominant paradigm to include less dominant ways of knowing such as Indigenous ways of knowing.

Chapter 1: Plotting my Map

[...] how people learn about historical injustices is as important as learning truths about what happened.

(Regan, 2010, p.11)

As a White, middle-class woman of European descent, I have been educated and brought up in the dominant culture. Only recently have I taken a step back to understand how my social location and position as a colonizer work together to shape my interactions with others. Vickers (2002) proposes that “to be a passive observer is in effect to support the continuation of the coloniser/colonised relationship: if one is passively observing injustice, then one is not confronting the offensive and oftentimes destructive behaviours inherent in colonialist thought” (p. 247). Through my research, I hoped to rise from being a passive observer to someone who actively works towards decolonizing themselves. This involved the exploration of my own worldviews and knowledge systems. Through this, I explored new ways of being White so that I can discover appropriate and respectful ways of working with Indigenous communities as a non-Indigenous social worker and professional. By becoming an ‘active observer’, I am working towards decolonizing myself with the hope that it may also encourage other non-Indigenous social workers, professionals and interested parties to engage in similar processes.

By encouraging other non-Indigenous people to engage in the process of decolonization, it is my intention that they may work towards disrupting existing and future injustices. In doing so, they can form their own acts of resistance within this space. I would like to be clear about what my intentions are not. I do not own a white cape and I am not a saviour, rescuer or a knight in shining armour. I do not have all of the solutions or answers to this injustice. I am someone who is learning to question and adjust my own lens in viewing the world and I want to take you, the reader, along to experience my journey.

In order to navigate my journey, I have to acknowledge where I have been. By exploring my past, I hope to analyze my upbringing and education to see how the two have come to shape who I have become as a person. In looking back, I have always thought I had experienced a pretty “standard” White, middleclass upbringing. I am the daughter of two White, middle-class parents and I was brought up in a small town located an hour outside of the city of Toronto. My distant ethnic background consists of English, Irish and Scottish but I would primarily identify as “Canadian”. I lived with my parents in a middle class neighbourhood and I attended public schools that serviced predominately White students. I have come to realise that I have had many privileges growing up that I have been often unaware of. Many of these privileges have existed in the context of my education.

Education has often been a mechanism for passing on knowledge, tradition and culture to future generations. I believe that my education was definitely influenced by the dominant culture and, as a result, has had an influence on how I have been constructed

and how I have also constructed myself. For example, when I attended elementary school, my day would begin in the same way: we would remove our shoes, unload our knapsacks, find our seats and sing the national anthem before we proceeded with the relevant lessons for the day. The dominant culture was highly enforced and this seemed to be very normal to me, so I was often unaware of its presence. For instance, it was also my experience that we usually only celebrated Christian holidays at school. I was also often unaware of other ways of being and knowing that existed beyond the parameters of the dominant paradigm. During my education, I admit that I never thought about questioning this.

I was brought up by my family to always work hard and strive to achieve my goals. This translated into the expectation that I should perform well in school to attain the marks I needed to get into a good university. Although financial fortune did not equate “success” in my family, I grew up with the belief that to be accomplished, I needed to do well in school so that I could get a good job. The term “success” was often used, especially within the education setting as school counsellors and teachers would encourage me to strive for “success” in whatever I did. And so, I did what was required; I worked hard, received good grades and was accepted to a number of great academic institutions.

Once I entered university, I encountered a new set of expectations that I quickly adopted. This often meant choosing academic pathways that appeared to be more aligned with the expectations of mainstream society. I felt pressure to choose academic pathways that would lead me to better job opportunities. I succumbed to this pressure and enrolled

in programs that seemed to adhere to these dominant expectations. In doing so, I had hoped that choosing these dominant pathways would help me in my pursuit of becoming “successful”.

Thus far, I have attended a total of four universities in my academic career. At each university, I have pursued different academic paths depending on where I was at in my life and what my goals were at the time. As mentioned, each of the programs and courses I have taken has fallen under the umbrella of the dominant society and I rarely ventured outside of it. Even though I have attended a couple of academic institutions that offer very reputable programs and courses that would be considered to be on the margins of the dominant academic paradigm, I did not elect to take them and the opportunity to learn from less dominant ways of knowing slipped past me. At that time, I had assumed that the more dominant academic courses would better fit my career plan and I had believed I would have no use for less dominant ways of knowing in my future career.

Recently, I have realised that my inadvertent proclivity to choose other academic pathways was my way of adhering to the dominant expectation that I should work towards achieving this ideal of becoming “successful”. This has been a very interesting discovery for me as it has taught me that the majority or dominant path is not always the right path. Sometimes we need to step off the beaten path to find and navigate our own pathways of academic worth and resistance.

Throughout my life, I have often chosen to find my own path rather than to follow the paths that have been laid out for me. I realise that I have chosen more dominant academic pathways but I have also been known to push boundaries. In this way, I have

performed my own acts of resistance. By pushing boundaries, I have often pushed back when given direction that I did not agree with. I was standing up for what I believed in regardless of what the expectations of the dominant society would rather have me do. Indeed, this in itself is an act of privilege. I was rarely penalized and I was able to perform these acts of resistance under the expectation that I would have little to no consequences. Although I have had these so-called rebel tendencies, it is important to acknowledge that I have still operated under the cloak of colonization. Therefore, these acts of resistance were still essentially shaped by the dominant society. However, I am hopeful that I can use these rebel tendencies to further disrupt social injustices by decolonizing myself and encouraging others to do the same.

At first, my narrow interests in more dominant academic pursuits may give the impression that I was ignorant, naïve and maybe a little egotistical. However, I was stuck in my own ways of knowing and I was comfortable in them. I did not consider it necessary to breach my bubble of knowledge or explore outside it. I merely wanted to obtain my credentials and settle into a secure job and this was the path that I ventured down.

After finishing my undergraduate degrees, I found myself in my first social work position in the domain of child welfare. I was ecstatic to have found myself a job and I quickly trained myself to work in a way that was praised by upper management. I was efficient, hard-working and productive and I attempted to emulate everything that is expected of workers in our current neoliberal society. However, this was not how I anticipated my first social work position to be. Originally, I believed that my social work

role would reflect the client-first philosophy which suggests that the client is the expert on their own lives. I felt pressure to conform to the agency's expectations as I wanted to ensure that I would be able to maintain my job in a period of time where jobs were few and sparse. I felt like the client's voice was being lost and that I was instead reinforcing what the agency wanted and what society deemed as "normal". I felt like I was progressing in my position but I also felt as if I was missing something.

It was not until I returned to school to complete my Master's degree a year later that I had the chance to think back and critically reflect on my practice and how it had developed. I began to find out what it was that I had been missing. I had not been given the ability to engage in enough reflexivity and I felt that this had vast implications on my development as a social worker. I lost sight of some of the principles and values I had developed during my education and I had replaced them with those of the agency, my supervisor and upper management. Most importantly, I began to realise that I was viewing the world mainly from the viewpoint of *my* social and cultural location. I could tell that I was not evolving into the social worker that I had always anticipated I would be. As a result, I was doubtful, discouraged and lost. These feelings confirmed evermore that I needed to explore these concerns and tensions by returning to school to complete my graduate degree.

Prior to beginning my graduate degree at McMaster University, I met my partner while on vacation in Jamaica. He is half Ojibwa and half White. I have had some exposure to Ojibwa culture as I have gradually been integrated into his family. Because of my relationship with my partner, I found myself gaining a different perspective on

how I wanted to explore the concerns and tensions I had experienced in my first social work position while at graduate school.

Feminist theory has highlighted the phrase “the personal is political” and I certainly began to observe this in my own life. Due to this new perspective, I began to see the politics of the personal in a new way. I was exposed to Indigenous culture, tradition and politics via my partner and his family. As a result, it became important for me to use this exposure and the resulting perspective to help me think and work through the concerns and tensions that I had. This new perspective shed light on issues I had never noticed before. I came to truly understand the domination of the current social and academic paradigms, the disproportionate number of Indigenous children in care at the agency I had worked at and the conditions of the First Nations reserves near my hometown. I became aware of other lenses in which to view the world and I was very much interested in exploring them.

Unsure of what my new found interest meant for myself and my future, I pondered the thought of using Indigenous knowledge systems and worldviews in the content of my research thesis. However, I was somewhat uncomfortable with the idea as I am clearly an outsider to Indigenous culture. As an outsider and as a researcher, I did not want to come across as “perpetuating an imperial belief” that I am entitled to conduct research with Indigenous populations (Regan, 2010).

I will face many limitations in attempting to conduct research that involves Indigenous people as a non-Indigenous person as it is a venture fraught with tension. Firstly, I was unsure of how I would be received by Indigenous people as a non-

Indigenous person attempting to do research concerning Indigenous populations.

Secondly, I did not want to cross any boundaries I had with my partner and his family that might be unsettling or cause them discomfort.

In addition to being an outsider, I am a White outsider. As a White outsider, I will inevitably carry with me the effects of being White. These effects have been viewed as being oppressive, exploitative, manipulative and of containing unearned privilege and power (Pitman, 2002). My social and cultural location will ultimately influence my interactions with others and I questioned whether it would even be possible for me to perform “good” research concerning this topic.

Haig-Brown (1992), an influential researcher in the field, pays tribute to this paradox by acknowledging the tensions of a non-Indigenous person working with Indigenous communities. She recommends that research findings should reflect the worldviews and knowledge systems of Indigenous people so that research can be useful for Indigenous communities. This author also discusses the concept of “border work” which refers to the ability of non-Indigenous researchers to work on the margins of the Western knowledge paradigm when collaborating with Indigenous communities. These margins have been viewed as a space for “survival, resistance and anticolonial discourse” for Indigenous people (Baskin, 2005, p.172).

Because of my own beliefs and ways of knowing, I have created a collection of assumptions and ideas that I carry with me. According to Baskin et al. (2008, p. 101), we are our “thoughts” and “memories” and these shape how we are represented in the world. Consequently, my past experiences, upbringing and education will shape how I am

constructed and how others will view me. Because I have been colonized and I have the face of the colonizer, I may be viewed in this way by others and I need to be constantly aware of this in any research that I conduct.

Owing to these presenting difficulties, I was uncertain as to whether my ability to work on the margins was feasible. Nevertheless, I remained hopeful that there could be some benefit and I began to explore how I could approach this research in ways that would be both appropriate and respectful for all populations involved. I thought it best to test the waters first by undertaking some smaller assignments on the topic in my courses. I began by writing papers on Indigenous child welfare, on the impact of policies on Indigenous communities and on how I might be received as an outsider attempting research that concerned Indigenous populations. I explored writing academic reports in less dominant academic ways and my most interesting pursuit was one in which I used the method of storytelling.

Although I became more comfortable with these types of projects, it made me realise that when I attempt projects and research in this manner I need to be aware that I was walking a fine line between respecting Indigenous culture and appropriating it. I knew that I needed to tread carefully because appropriation of Indigenous culture has been an issue both in the past and present. Recently, many non-Indigenous people have become quite interested in Indigenous culture and tradition as it is currently a very “hot” and “sexy” topic. In fact, current fashion trends have also been paying attention as many non-Indigenous people are dressing in clothing and accessories inspired by Indigenous culture. In the words of my friend, “Native is ‘in’”.

Well-known playwright and author, Drew Hayden Taylor (2001), responded to the increasing popularity of non-Indigenous people's interest in Indigenous culture in a well-written and witty article. The article reviewed the allure that some non-Indigenous people have in identifying as Indigenous merely because they are in relationships with Indigenous partners. He has called this adoption of cultural identity as "spousal cultural appropriation" or SCA. It was an intriguing article to read but I could not help but wonder whether I was perpetuating this same stereotype. Would people think that my new found interest in this topic because I was in a relationship with someone who is First Nations was an appropriation? I pondered this for quite some time and wondered what this might mean for my research and how it might be received.

I am not Indigenous and I have never tried to be. I am who I am. My relationship with my partner has opened my eyes to an issue that I was formerly unaware of but I do not intend to appropriate Indigenous knowledge or ways of being. I am merely seeking to review ways in which non-Indigenous people can work with Indigenous populations in appropriate and respectful ways. I think that being cognizant of the issue of appropriation is an important step in this type of research. It will be important to critically reflect on the work and research that I do to ensure that I do not appropriate Indigenous culture and that my research reflects my self and not others. This will help in minimizing the harm that appropriation can cause.

Other researchers have addressed the problem of appropriation as well. Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008, p.141) state that non-Indigenous people need to ask themselves: "What is the difference between a celebration of indigenous knowledge and an

appropriation?” Including my own stories and self-narratives could be considered an appropriation of Indigenous knowledge as I am attempting to use a framework that has been used by Indigenous people within their research. Although I want to use portions of my own ways of knowing that are compatible with Indigenous worldviews for the dissemination of this research, I do not want to adopt Indigenous worldviews as they are not my own and I do not have the history and background knowledge to truly understand them. Adopting these as my own could perpetuate the problematic belief that White people are capable of fixing Indigenous issues and concerns.

Regan (2010, p. 46) affirms that, “It is integral to the misguided settler belief that our primary responsibility is to channel our caring impulses into solving the Indian problem”. An appropriation of Indigenous culture could suggest that this is what I am intending to do and this is a tension that I will be constantly working to mitigate. As a result, I will always be checking in with my own ways of knowing and beliefs to critically reflect on them so that I am not crossing over to an appropriation of Indigenous culture and knowledge.

It has taken some time to arrive and settle upon my thesis topic. I have grappled with personal relationships, family and work experiences as it pertains to it. Originally, my topic was far beyond my capacity to fully understand and navigate, so I have had to compromise in order to settle on a topic I could morally and ethically reconcile with. Therefore, my research question is how I, as a White social worker, can work towards decolonizing myself to make room for other ways of knowing, such as Indigenous knowledge systems? How do I, as a White person, work and think across these

differences? I intend to push my own boundaries in this research project and to make use of my rebel tendencies to question my own thoughts and beliefs to lift my own cloak of colonization.

Chapter 2: The Dilemma of Essentialism

Indigenous people are very diverse. The problem of essentialism is a constant dilemma when research or service delivery involves Indigenous populations as essentialism can propose a challenge to the recognition of identity for Indigenous people. The risk that Pol Neveu (2010) identifies is that minority groups, such as Indigenous people, could wrongly be viewed as homogenous and as uniform entities. Linguistically, the term identity insinuates a sense of essentialism in and of itself (Trechter & Bucholtz, 2001). As a result, the beliefs, values and connotations that accompany identities can come together to create an essentialist image. This can be problematic as what may be appropriate for one person may not be appropriate for another. As a result, some non-Indigenous social workers or professionals may believe that all Indigenous people should be serviced or approached in the same manner.

Social work practitioners and professionals need to be aware of a wide range of factors when they provide services to Indigenous people. Having an understanding of what the clients' needs are based on what they have identified their needs to be is very important. Education on the labels and terms that have arisen due to the history of colonization is necessary to provide services that are appropriate for Indigenous people. This often involves educating oneself on the different terms as well as the meanings and implications that these terms carry.

There are large discrepancies across the literature in regards to the terms and names that are used to denote Indigenous populations. The many terms that I had come across include: Indigenous, Aboriginal, Native, Indian, First Peoples, First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Amerindians, the Maori of New Zealand and Aborigines (particular to Australia). It is important to note that these terms are constantly changing and are often contested. Therefore, it became difficult to choose a term that would denote this population within my thesis.

Choosing a term is very important as each of them carry a certain set of meanings, interpretations and ideas. Baskin et al. (2008) used the term Aboriginal in their research to refer to all categories of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in Canada including status and non-status Aboriginals. The terms “Native American” and “Amerindian” were used to represent those descendents of multiple tribal nations in research conducted by Hodge, Limb and Cross (2009). Peters (2006) believes that the term “First Nations” can be used by all people who identify with it even if they are not registered or are status “Indians” as per the Indian Act and that the term “Aboriginal” can be used to denote all Indigenous people in Canada.

Some terms have been given to Indigenous populations by Europeans and continue to be used today. The term Métis is one of them. According to Baskin et al. (2008), the term Métis is contested as it is a label that was given by European settlers during the process of colonization. Métis comes from a French origin which means “half-breed” or “half-blood” (Baskin et al., 2008). Due to this classification, Métis people are not legally characterized in the same way that First Nations people are and this inability

to identify in the same way has been categorized as a success story for colonizers (Baskin et al., 2008).

In addition to the many terms, there are many bands and lineages of Indigenous people in North America, Australia and other countries. These bands and lineages display a wide range of diversity. In Canada, there are three overarching categories of Indigenous people: Inuit, Métis and First Nations. Each category contains many different groupings or bands within them. For example, there are approximately 630 different First Nations bands across Canada (Assembly of First Nations, 2012). These bands can differ greatly in their languages, customs and traditions. As a result, Indigenous people can not and should not be defined by one single Indigenous voice (Baskin, 2005).

With this being said, it could be problematic to assume that using the term “Indigenous” in my thesis would refer to all of the Indigenous populations within Canada. I was told by one professor this year that “when you attempt to universalize something, you are essentially excluding or silencing something else” (R. Sin, personal communication, February 16, 2012). I was fearful that choosing a term would result in the silencing of some of these populations and this was a tension for me as I do not have the authority or am in the position to choose one label over another.

Ultimately, I chose a term that is widely recognized across the literature. For the purposes of this research, the term Indigenous will be used to reflect all First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Indians regardless of status in this land we call Canada. Some authors believe that the term “Indigenous” refers to the way in which Aboriginal people interact with the environment (Getty, 2010). Other researchers have stated that it refers to the

recognized and shared story of colonization (Smith, 2005). I believe that the term “Indigenous” refers to anyone who identifies with it and has this shared history of colonization.

The term non-Indigenous is also used within the research so I would like to identify what the term non-Indigenous will refer to as well. When reference is made to non-Indigenous people, I am merely referring to anyone who does not identify as Indigenous, Aboriginal, Native, Indian, First Peoples, First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Amerindians, Maori, Aborigines or any other groups who might be classified in this way. The term non-Indigenous does not have particular ties to any country or culture and is used freely in this research as a result.

Chapter 3: Connecting the Personal

Sometimes our own stories serve as learning sites where reflecting on these stories can help us to learn about ourselves. Through these reflections, we can learn to connect ourselves to others as well as different social conditions (Averett, 2009). These connections are important as they can make researchers more equipped to resist oppressive social conditions (Allen & Piercy, 2005). One of my own stories is highlighted in the next paragraph. This story demonstrates some of the connections I have made between myself, the Other and the oppressive social conditions that Indigenous people have experienced.

The Story:

It all started during a dinner with my family. During this dinner, my grandparents invited my parents and I to a Christmas party their friends were hosting. The party was being held at a house in my hometown. This was no ordinary house. This large two-story, red brick farmhouse towers over the other newer homes on the street. In the front yard, several large maple trees seem to guard its entrance.

I have always been curious about this house and have longed to go inside since I was a little girl. There have been several owners and I knew that the current owners had done some renovations. During these renovations, I heard that a secret room had been

discovered behind one of the walls so this invitation was a perfect opportunity to venture into a place I had always wanted to go. Intrigued by this invitation, I agreed to attend.

My family and I walked up the inclined driveway and made our way to the old servants' entrance that has been transformed into a breezeway connecting the garage to the newly renovated kitchen. Once inside, we were greeted by the woman of the house. She was a shorter woman who exuded a friendly and sincere energy. My grandparents introduced my family to her and we began talking. I immediately began inquiring about the house and she directed me towards a picture hanging on her fridge. It was a picture of the house. The picture had been taken prior to the construction of the other houses in the area and the woman thought that it had been taken in 1950.

She explained that the house used to be a family home on an old horse farm. She pointed to the laneway that had led to the house and told me that it has since been turned into the street that this house and the other newer homes are located. The barn structure is still somewhat intact and is now used to border the gardens at the rear of two houses across the street. The woman began to tell me about the many renovations that had been done and she explained that her and her partner insisted on keeping the traditional look of the house as much as possible. As a result, the house was the perfect combination of traditional influence and modern design.

After some conversation, I could not help but ask about the secret room. She told me that they had been doing renovations in their living room and had found a hollow wall. Unsure of what was behind it, they knocked it down to find a small space that contained a fireplace and some bookshelves. She explained that there were a number of

items they had found in the room. Most fascinating of these items was a leather-bound book that they had found on the mantle of the fireplace. She asked if I wanted to see the items they had discovered and I was eager to accept. She produced a bag of her collections from the room: a piece of the trim from the wall, a section of wallpaper, an old newspaper and a leather-bound book.

I picked up the book and was immediately amazed. The book, which was titled “The Wooing of Hiawatha”, was printed in 1907 on what seemed to be mock birch bark paper. At first glance, the book appeared to be about an Indigenous story. It struck me as “Hiawatha” is the name of one of the local First Nations reserves that I have always been familiar with growing up. I explained to the homeowner that I had been questioning the topic of my research thesis for my Master’s program and that the discovery of the book may have aided me in my decision. She offered to let me borrow the book until I had finished my research thesis.

And so the journey began. I needed to determine what the history was behind the book so I began to research it. I discovered that the book was written in 1907 by Henry W. Longfellow who is most likely known for his poem, “The Song of Hiawatha” (McNally, 2006). Longfellow was a British author who often wrote narrative poetry; some of which seemed to combine excerpts from non-fictional Indigenous stories with his own fictional stories (Chadwick-Healey, 2001). According to Roylance (2007), Longfellow has been criticized for his incorporation of Scandinavian myths which had no relevance to the Indigenous stories he was attempting to emulate. Because his inclusion

of Indigenous history and culture was often inaccurate, he has also been criticized for the racist underpinnings in his stories.

His storytelling methodology was very popular and he became known for his use of romanticism within his literary works (von Frank, 2007). His work would most likely be considered problematic in today's society due to his romantic appeal of the Indigenous. This romance of the Other creates an allure of the unfamiliar or the unknown which can make it more appealing and exotic. His sensationalism of this in his stories seems to attempt to do the same. As a result, his work has constantly been criticized for his appropriation of Indigenous culture for the gain of notoriety and financial success (Royslance, 2007).

Longfellow's work has also been long recognized for his depictions of the loss of "Indian" people and culture (McNally, 2006). Although this is problematic today, this type of writing about the cultural "other" did prove both appealing and accessible to the Euro-Western reader at that time (von Frank, 2007). Because of this, Longfellow wrote in a time that appeared to be more accepting of non-Indigenous authors writing about Indigenous stories. His stories were in themselves colonizing, but they encouraged non-Indigenous people to take interest in a topic that may have otherwise been inaccessible or unacknowledged.

This colonizing approach to writing is extremely problematic but this new insight proved invaluable to my research as I struggled with my decision on whether to pursue a project involving Indigenous people. It confirmed evermore that my research should not make recommendations for Indigenous populations, it should not romanticize the Other

and it should not appropriate Indigenous culture. However, I was now certain that my research could allow me to address other people from my own social and cultural location. I could write my research to speak to a non-Indigenous audience.

It seemed that finding this book gave me the much needed confidence to pursue this thesis. This farmhouse was a place that I had always wanted to go but did not have a way of getting to and so was my desire to explore Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing. The invitation to this house broke down a barrier that had prevented me from entering this house. In this, I found my own connection: I could break down my own barriers in attempting to work and think across difference by learning about myself and exploring other ways of knowing and being. It was in this moment that I decided that pursuing this research project was a way in which I could potentially assist other non-Indigenous people in the same pursuits.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

A couple weeks after I had confirmed the topic for my research thesis, I had dinner at my partner's parents' house. As we sat around the table, I felt uneasy as the topic of my research resurfaced. One of my partner's family members wanted to hear about the progress I had made in deciding on a research topic for my Master's thesis. Normally my conversations about this are independent of the Indigenous side of his family and I am quick to engage them with only a slight degree of discomfort. However, all were present for this dinner. My anxiety soared, my throat became dry and I became increasingly uncomfortable. By now, his whole family was looking towards me awaiting my response. My mind instantly went blank and my words and thoughts became scattered. After ten minutes of my incessant babble, I managed to get through my thesis topic. As soon as I had finished talking, I sat back to observe the damage I had just caused. Amidst the stares from his non-Indigenous family, I quickly darted my eyes back to the Indigenous members. His father remained silent while his brother smiled. I was as confused as ever; what did this reaction mean?

I came to realise that the tensions that I will face with this research were never going away. I am a White, non-Indigenous woman. I will never be Indigenous and, because of this, I will never fully understand what it is to be Indigenous. These tensions would be persistent and it would be up to me to decide how to manage them. This made me realise that I needed to learn how to speak and write about my topic in a way that

would be communicated properly to my audience. This has led me to understand the importance of choosing an appropriate and suitable research methodology for my research.

I have come to understand that I will make mistakes as I learn ways in which I can appropriately and respectfully work with Indigenous communities as a non-Indigenous person. I will definitely become vulnerable throughout this research project but I am hopeful that this vulnerability will create sites for further learning. I will do my best to not offend others but I am attempting to think and work across difference and this is an uneasy pursuit that can be very difficult and complex. I am an outsider and because of this I will never fully have a grasp of the Other.

Many scholars have embarked upon the dilemma of the insider/outsider debate. Pitman (2002, p. 286) asks the question; “can we accurately and sensitively represent the experiences of the ‘other’?” Emmanuel Levinas (1969) contests that no one can ever truly claim to know the “Other” or to be able to represent the “Other”. He asserts that, regardless of information, our representations of the “other” will always be inadequate as “persons exceed representation” (Rossiter, 2011, p.983). Further, Levinas comes from a position that when you attempt to know the “Other” you are building on existing prior knowledge and beliefs and this results in treating the other person as an extension of your knowing (Rossiter, 2011). This means that even when we try to understand someone else from their viewpoint, we still carry our own preconceptions that ultimately invade this and we really end up only working towards understanding them from our own viewpoints. This is the premise for Levinasian ethics.

Levinas (1969) explains that when you claim to know the “Other”, this claim can become a source for violence. When we think we know the “Other” we may believe that we know what is best or appropriate for them. I agree that one cannot truly represent anyone other than themselves and that we need to be careful of assuming we know the Other. The colonial lens of assuming we know what is in the best interest of the Other is inherently embedded within the dominant paradigm but it is not the only lens in which to view the world. Limiting oneself to just one lens can be a very dangerous and harmful act. It is during these times of certainty that we are capable of doing the most damage. In doing so, good intentions could turn into perilous consequences. What is important is to take the time to learn about the “Other” and the self.

In order to learn about the “Other”, a person needs to develop the ability to cross cultural boundaries whilst also re-evaluating the self (Chang, 2008). One way of writing research that appeals to this is through the use of self-narratives. It is argued that writing self-narratives that include experiences with “Others” can help people discover new aspects and perspectives to their own lives. We can then use these discoveries of the self and build on them to further understand others.

These narratives elicit meaning and allow the researcher to delve deeper into the discovery of these meanings (Barton, 2004). As a non-Indigenous researcher, Barton (2004) discovered that narrative inquiry can serve as an important mixed-perspective approach where she could combine Indigenous perspectives with what she refers to as Anglo-Irish perspectives. As her research progressed the stories that she generated seemed to become interwoven with the Indigenous stories she encountered and this

resulted in the creation of new stories. She explained that these stories created “bridges” to meaning and inquiry for her (Barton, 2004). I would take this one step further and say that these “bridges” of thought serve as new pathways to other knowledge systems or ways of knowing. From my standpoint, these pathways represent the fundamental shifts that can occur when meaning is discovered.

I relate to Barton (2004) and her perspective on how stories emerge, are dispersed and are received. I am using a type of narrative inquiry in my research and it is my hope that my own narrative inquiry might serve as a bridge for those interested in learning to work and think across difference. It is also my hope that my stories will serve as a pathway to other less dominant worldviews, knowledge systems and ways of knowing. These bridges and pathways may offer a better understanding of how to navigate appropriate and respectful ways of working with Indigenous people as a non-Indigenous person. With this being said, my interest in self-narratives is used to help establish my theoretical framework.

With never having committed to one epistemological approach, I have often grappled with which one I feel that I adhere to. Often classmates and academic peers in school have been quick to assert their epistemological approach while I have sat idle and wondered where I might fit. I believe that this may be due to the fact that I am more flexible in my epistemological stance than what is usually expected in the dominant academy. As previously discussed, I have never felt that I entirely represent mainstream attitudes and I have often pushed back against dominant expectations. I think that this has

definitely had an impact on why I feel that my theoretical framework has been somewhat elusive in nature.

My epistemology represents more of a holistic paradigm that is open to several different value systems. Because of this, I do not feel comfortable restricting or confining myself to one particular epistemology. However, I do know how I feel about the research I am doing. I believe that there is no single truth and that everyone has their own truth depending on their social location. For this reason I may fit into either the postmodern paradigm or the social constructionist approach and I am sure that my epistemology reflects aspects of each of these.

Postmodernism arose when the era of modernity became contested (Blake, 1996). The postmodern paradigm asserts that there are no universal truths that exist within the world (Noble, 2004). In this way of thinking, reality can be produced by imagination (Powell, 2001). My epistemology reflects the notion that universal truths are irrelevant to a world that should recognize many truths and ways of knowing.

On the other hand, the social constructionist approach “commonly rejects essentialist explanations of the world” but contains no single definition (Burr, 2003; Cunliffe, 2008, p. 124). This epistemological approach states that society is both objective and subjective and, because of this, elucidates that everyone’s social realities are created through their internalized interpretations of the world and their conversations with others about the world (Berger & Luckmann, 1996). Therefore, it looks critically at our “taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world” (Burr, 2003, p. 2). In accordance with this, my views resonate with this approach as my own thoughts and

beliefs have been created and internalized by my own personal experiences. Although fragments of these two epistemologies are strongly correlated with my own epistemology, I believe that my epistemological approach is far greater than what can be represented by either one of these.

Chilisa (2012) discusses the notion of a “transformative paradigm” which belongs to a family of theoretical frameworks that share the same goal of transforming and emancipating communities through the use of a critical lens. This “transformative paradigm” is more attuned to the beliefs and value systems that I withhold. Furthermore, this paradigm helps to shed light on the domination that Western academia has had in knowledge production which is of particular interest to me and this research project. The “transformative paradigm” includes several different theoretical frameworks such as critical theory, feminist theory, postcolonial theory and Indigenous theory (Chilisa, 2012). I will be drawing upon elements of this “transformative paradigm” whilst also focusing on the arenas of Postmodernism, social constructionism and critical social science to help shape my theoretical framework.

Having recognized my theoretical framework, I sought a way that I could disseminate my research that would be respectful and appropriate for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. I struggled with finding a methodology that would be suitable as many were too scientific, objective and I felt that they would not capture the true story and meaning behind the research. I did not want a traditional methodology and was searching for a way in which I could write the research that was unconventional and thought-provoking.

Cole (2002) is an Indigenous author who writes in a way that challenges dominant ways of thinking. This way could be considered “outside of the box” and this has shown me that, as researchers, we do not have to be confined by dominant methodologies. Using this perspective, I was seeking a different, less dominant methodology that put an emphasis on qualitative research, was compatible with my understandings of Indigenous culture, worldviews and ways of knowing and was also accessible to non-Indigenous populations.

In my research, I include quite a few stories in juxtaposition with interviews and relevant literature. By combining personal meaning with both academic and non-academic material, I hoped that it would be more accessible for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The use of storytelling was of interest to me and it is considered to be very much compatible with Indigenous epistemologies and knowledge systems (McKeough, Bird, Tourigny, Romaine, Graham, Ottmann, & Jeary, 2008). Stories have always resonated with my methods of learning and the process of writing has served as a creative outlet for me in the past. For these aforementioned reasons, I feel that the use of storytelling is compatible with both my epistemology and the way in which I would like to disseminate my research results to my audience.

In search of a methodology, autoethnography was suggested to me. After researching it further, it appeared that this methodology would be able to satisfy all of the requirements I had outlined for my research. Primarily, it seemed that autoethnography would be suitable for the inclusion of the stories that I wanted to incorporate into the writing of my research.

Originally, autoethnography arose out of Postmodernism as it is concerned with disrupting social systems, describing personal experiences and disseminating research using arts-based methods (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Neuman, 2011). This approach does not conform to the academic and scholarly journal format that research in the dominant academy typically follows. Because of this, I was very interested in using this methodology as I wanted a methodology that was considered to be a less dominant approach to research. I wanted a methodology that was not considered to be part of the mainstream academy and that could stretch the academic boundaries that I had felt confined to in previous academic programs.

Autoethnography is considered to be a “reflexive-narrative” that is both a process and a product (Chang, 2008). This resonated with me as I felt that this research would also be a work in progress. Therefore, this methodology would suit this research project because it reflects a beginning step in decolonization and learning to work and think across difference; thus, representing both a process and a product.

Autoethnography also represents a qualitative approach to research that incorporates ethnographic, interpretive and autobiographical frameworks (Ellis, et al., 2011). Furthermore, Ellis et al. (2011) explain that researchers use “tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography”. Researchers using autoethnography use their own personal experiences to attempt to further describe and analyze a certain cultural or social experience (Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010). Similarly, I can use my own personal experience along with corresponding interviews and relevant literature to connect to this cross-cultural issue of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations.

Autoethnography will be used to help form the journey that I am embarking on in regards to pursuing my own decolonization and my ability to work and think across difference.

A researcher using autoethnography uses their own personal experience as their primary data in order to connect with the broader social context (Chang, 2008). Namely, the researcher focuses on the “connections between self and social, using self as an entry point” (Taber, 2010, p. 15). As mentioned, throughout my journey towards decolonization and learning to work and think across difference, I include my own personal stories. These stories serve as my own entry point in connecting with the broader social context of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. These stories also highlight important transformative shifts that take place during my interactions with relevant literature and my participants’ stories.

Autoethnography can take on many forms which appeals to its artistic nature. Some of the most commonly used forms are short stories, personal narratives, poetry, fiction, journals and scripts (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008). Throughout the writing process, researchers “retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 4).

There are several different types of data collection that researchers using autoethnography can utilize. Chang (2008) highlights four primary areas of data collection: personal memory data, self-observational data, self-reflective data and external data. For Chang (2008), it is very important to be able to triangulate between data sources, literature and personal experience to work towards the credibility and

quality of the research. Therefore, this triangulation is also demonstrated throughout this research as I am consistently navigating between my personal stories, literature and participants' interviews.

Autoethnography is often confused with narrative research as it shares some parallels. It is important to distinguish between the two so it is worthy to note that the story of the researcher is primary to the way in which the research is written in autoethnography, whereas the narrative approach is more concerned with the inclusion of several stories (Taber, 2010). In my research, my own story is highlighted and is used as a reference point for the accompanying stories of my participants within this thesis.

Ethnography is a methodology that has caused some tensions for populations in the past who have been marginalized (Chang, 2008). Therefore, as a researcher, I need to be careful in my use of ethnography within this methodology. It is important to acknowledge that the use of ethnography within my methodology will be used to only represent my own journey in exploring appropriate and respectful ways to work with Indigenous populations using my social entry point.

Although community-engaged research would have been most desirable for this research, establishing community engagement can take some time and I needed to fit my research into the time constraints of the Master's program requirements. Due to time constraints, learning everything there is to know about Indigenous culture and tradition from Indigenous participants was not feasible nor would it have been appropriate as I do not have the ability to give recommendations to a population that I will never fully understand or be a part of. However, learning how to be respectful to Indigenous

populations through the view point of other, White, non-Indigenous people who have worked in appropriate and respectful ways was. Because of this, I decided that the use of non-Indigenous participants was more compatible with my journey in attempting to work and think across difference as other non-Indigenous participants who had worked with Indigenous populations had operated from similar cultural and social locations to me.

I include interviews with three non-Indigenous people who have been identified by an Indigenous academic as having worked in appropriate and respectful ways with Indigenous populations. I use these interviews as a way to look at how these non-Indigenous people have successfully worked along the margins of cultural boundary. I conducted semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews that lasted between one and two hours in length. Qualitative interviews were used so that the story of the participants could be heard.

Participants were provided with a list of sample questions prior to the interviews. Questions primarily revolved around what capacity the participants had worked with Indigenous populations and how they deemed their work as being “successful” or as having “relevance” with these communities. Participants were also asked how they viewed the differences between Indigenous and dominant worldviews, knowledge systems and ways of knowing and how they have managed to work within the space between them. A full list of sample questions that were used in the interviews can be found in Appendix C.

Although these questions were used to guide the interview, interviews were semi-open as I wanted the participants to be able to discuss concepts that they felt were

important to them. This included some stories or experiences relevant to the research that may not have been accessed with the use of a more formally structured interview. In this way, I was able to obtain information that was needed for the purposes of this research as well as additional information that proved invaluable as well.

Interviews occurred between the months of June and July and were audio recorded. Written notes were also taken. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim using both the audio recordings and the written notes. These transcriptions were then used for the purposes of analysis. My analysis of the interviews was informed by grounded theory. The aim of grounded theory is to “generate explanatory propositions that correspond to real-world phenomena” (Patton, 2002, p. 489). Using elements of grounded theory, the transcriptions were analyzed for units of meaning (Lavallée, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once these units of meanings were identified, they were coded. These codes were then categorized into overarching themes. Organizing these themes assisted in the discovery of the participant’s stories which helped me form bridges to my own stories. These categories and their conceptual relationships laid the groundwork for the analysis portion of this research project.

I wanted to seek out how these non-Indigenous people had been able to work within these cracks of difference and had done so appropriately to build bridges and relationships in this space. In order to help myself work and think across difference, I needed to be able to determine how to manage the tensions in working within this space and learn from the participants’ experiences. Through this, I could develop new ways of being White that would be compatible in working with Indigenous populations.

It would be problematic for me to choose the participants as I do not have the authority to decide who has been “successful” with Indigenous people and who has not. As a White, non-Indigenous person I would be perpetuating the imperial belief that I am able to decide what is appropriate for a group of people in which I do not belong. I did not want to perpetuate this so I decided that it would be most appropriate if the potential sample population came from someone who was an insider to this community.

As a result, I decided to consult with an Indigenous academic in the department of Social Work at McMaster University. Her name is Bonnie Freeman. Bonnie is an experienced Indigenous scholar in the area that has worked with other professionals on a national scale. I asked Bonnie to identify a group of non-Indigenous people whom she thought had “successfully” worked with Indigenous populations in some capacity. She directed me towards a potential sample population in which I could attempt to recruit from. This potential sample population mostly existed in the surrounding area and were identified by Bonnie as people who had done appropriate work with Indigenous communities.

After receiving approval from the McMaster University Research Ethics Board, the potential sample population was accessed via email and I primarily recruited through this method. A copy of the recruitment email poster can be found in Appendix B. This resulted in the confirmation of three participants: two who work in a research capacity with Indigenous populations and one who had worked in a community liaison-type role that involved working towards connecting an Indigenous population with a neighbouring municipal population. A more thorough description of the participants can be found in the

Interviews and Results section (Chapter 8). Participants were required to complete an Information and Consent Form and a full copy of this can be found in Appendix A. Not all participants were social workers by trade but this allowed me to draw upon experiences from different types of roles that non-Indigenous people have had with Indigenous populations.

Chapter 5: Exploring Decolonization

Once I really started exploring this research topic, I started to notice Indigenous-related issues and services everywhere. I became more familiar with the different First Nations reserves around me, noticed programs about residential schools on television, saw Indigenous events in and around my neighbourhood and recognized buildings servicing Indigenous populations. I become aware of the issues that exist and I tried to understand how colonization has influenced and impacted them.

I questioned why I had not been aware of these issues before. I came to truly understand that I had previously viewed the world solely from my own social and cultural location. The way that I had learned about the world was compatible with my own beliefs and values and I did not seem to need to understand other ways of knowing as it was beyond my scope of what I thought I needed to know. Other ways of knowing had been present but they received little to no acknowledgement from me. For instance, I had learned about some Indigenous issues in school but they did not seem to resonate with me. As far as I was concerned at that time, I was not going to be working with Indigenous people in my future practice. To be upfront and forthcoming, I did not think that there were areas that were highly populated with Indigenous people in the areas I would be working. I could not have been further from the truth as there is not a single place I could go in this country where I would not be in the presence of Indigenous people.

I wondered why I had held this perspective and why I had not explored outside of it. Regan (2010) defines this aversion to reflecting on ourselves as the problem of “settler denial”. In her book, she highlights the philosopher Trudy Govier who writes about “the Canadian propensity to deny by ignoring or minimizing already known truths because they ‘are incompatible with the favoured picture we have of ourselves’” (Regan, 2010, p. 34). Although unintentionally, I learned that I was also guilty of this. I did not think to reflect on myself in this way before because the perspective that I had on the world was compatible with the perspectives of the dominant society. Therefore, the dominant society continued to reinforce my worldviews and ways of knowing as I grew up.

I am colonized and I have participated in my own colonization. My inability to understand my own colonization has resulted in my unintended propensity to colonize others in the process. I began to work to break down the colonial walls that have held up my worldviews and ways of knowing. I realised that I was not an innocent bystander in regards to my colonization. I needed to become active in disrupting the resulting social injustices because I am also part of the problem. I have a role in this and I could no longer remain idle. I realise that my worldviews and ways of knowing are not superior to other less dominant worldviews and ways of knowing and I needed to ensure that my actions and beliefs do not negatively affect others. I use this starting point as a way to explore how I can work with Indigenous populations as a non-Indigenous person in appropriate and respectful ways.

In regards to who should service Indigenous communities, the answer is clear; Indigenous communities are best equipped to serve their own populations as they have

the history, context and understanding to do so. It might not be preferable for non-Indigenous people to work with Indigenous communities but I think it is currently unavoidable. This is because the service provisions for Indigenous people are often carried out by non-Indigenous workers, especially in more urban areas.

Other circumstances also increase the likelihood of Indigenous people to receive services from non-Indigenous people. For instance, Indigenous people sometimes prefer to seek assistance outside of their communities with non-Indigenous specific organizations due to the nature of confidentiality. This makes it ever more important to address how non-Indigenous people can properly work with Indigenous communities so that Indigenous people can access services in an appropriate and respectful manner.

During my time in child welfare, I experienced first-hand how many Indigenous children and families were being serviced by non-Indigenous workers off-reserve. I have learned how Indigenous people can be harmed and targeted by policies and programs that are predominately informed by Euro-Western principles. The colonization that is embedded within these services is prevalent. As Victor (2007, p. 9) states,

The very process of colonization is an extremely violent act. Colonial violence can take many forms. It can be obvious such as in racially motivated rapes and murders. Or it can be subtle and difficult to identify as in colonial legislation such as the Indian Act and certain child welfare policies and practices.

An example of this violence is the disproportionate number of Indigenous children that are currently in care. Indigenous children represent 5% of the population of children in Canada, yet they represent 30-40% of the children in care (Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005). Indigenous children continue to be apprehended from their homes and communities and are often placed in non-Indigenous families where cultural and historical traditions are in danger of being lost (Hand, 2006). Part of this over-representation has been thought to be due to the imposition of Euro-Western worldviews and ways of knowing found within child welfare policies (Blackstock, 2011). As a result, Indigenous communities continue to be oppressed by a system that is essentially designed for Euro-Western populations.

As previously mentioned, it is not just child welfare policies that are influenced by colonial values and ideologies. Colonialism has penetrated most realms of dominant society. For instance, Vickers (2002) states that the “Academic society in Canada is rooted in a colonial history of cultural oppression of First Nations peoples in the appropriation of lands and resources (p. 247). Research is another area of academia that is not immune to this. For instance, dominant research processes are overtaken by Western-based approaches. Baskin (2005) refers to Western approaches to research as those approaches that are based on Eurocentric concepts. In line with this, my notion of the “dominant academy” describes research and education that is occupied by Euro-Western ideologies resulting in primarily Euro-Western conclusions and outcomes.

It is important to note that dominant practices, policies and education do not offer neutrality (Dumbrill & Green, 2008). They are often biased and are not always inclusive of other worldviews, knowledge systems and ways of knowing. Dominant education and

research paradigms can differ significantly from other less dominant paradigms and it is important to understand these differences.

Dominant worldviews tends to focus more so on the individual context whereas Indigenous worldviews favour a more collectivistic approach (Baskin et al., 2008). There is a relatedness and interconnectedness that exists within Indigenous epistemologies which assumes that everything in the world is connected and that nothing is separate from anything else (Lavallée, 2009). This does not seem to be as present in more dominant epistemologies.

In dominant education and research, emphasis is usually placed on the academic credentials of the researcher as a way to demonstrate intelligence and credibility (Baskin, 2005). The importance placed on academic credentials within dominant education and research does not necessarily exist within other paradigms. For example, traditional knowledge is emphasized and is usually passed down orally from generation to generation in Indigenous knowledge systems whereas the dominant education requires pursuing education at accredited institutions (Lavallée, 2009).

These worldviews and knowledge systems also differ in the approaches that each take to medicine. In regards to treatments and healing, Indigenous healing practices focus on restoring balance within someone's life in a number of categories which allows it to take on a much more holistic stance. This is different from more dominant healing practices that are primarily rooted within the medical model which believes that a person can be specifically treated for their particular ailment. In this model, there are cures and there is the belief that people can be fixed.

The Medicine Wheel is a commonly used teaching particular to Indigenous populations. The Medicine Wheel consists of a circle that is split into quadrants (Dumbrill & Green, 2008). Each quadrant is identified by a different colour. These colours typically consist of red, yellow, black and white but can vary depending on the different Indigenous populations. Each quadrant represents a different property and includes the emotional, the mental, the spiritual and the physical. The teachings of the Wheel involve a starting point: it begins at the east point of the Wheel where new beginnings are formed and it is supposed to be followed in a clockwise fashion so that it comes full circle to the north where reflection and future direction is discovered. These four components represent an equality where no component is more significant than or separate from another. The Medicine Wheel represents the holistic nature of Indigenous worldviews, knowledge systems and ways of knowing. It also recognizes the cyclical nature of Indigenous belief systems. The Medicine Wheel is a highly regarded symbol for Indigenous people and is used to represent the totality of their lives.

It is important for dominant worldviews, knowledge systems and ways of knowing to step back so that other less dominant ways of knowing can have space within the current academic paradigm. Other less dominant ways of knowing continue to increase their space in the dominant education and research paradigms. Academic programs, such as social work, are increasingly opening up to offer both mandatory and elective courses that focus on Indigenous ways of knowing and worldviews (Baskin et al., 2008).

More and more Indigenous researchers are emerging to promote decolonizing methodologies in research. According to Razack (2009, p. 16), “Decolonizing pedagogy allows for the critical analysis of classroom spaces to examine how spaces are racialized and also gendered and therefore fundamental to our understandings of power and exploitation”. The dominant academy needs to move over to make space for other knowledge systems, such as Indigenous knowledge systems. Creating space can be a complex process but researchers seem to be in union with how it should be done; researchers agree this requires a decolonization of the current academic paradigm (Kovach, 2005; Lavallée, 2009).

Decolonization is a term that needs to be explored as its meaning is contested. Decolonization can be described as

A process of acknowledging the history of colonialism; working to undo the effects of colonialism; striving to unlearn habits, attitudes, and behaviours that continue to perpetuate colonialism; and challenging and transforming institutional manifestations of colonialism.

(Reinsborough & Barndt, 2010, p. 161)

Decolonization has also been referred to as a “totality that places capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy and Western Christianity in radical contingency” (Grande, 2008, p. 244). Needless to say, decolonization is a complex process which requires constant reflexivity.

Decolonizing research does not have a specific set of instructions or guidelines and certainly does not have a distinct definition (Swadener & Mutua, 2008). As a result, there are many ways in which to conduct decolonizing research. Decolonizing methodologies, such as Indigenous methodologies, can include research methods such as sharing circles and symbol-based reflection (Lavallée, 2009). Most importantly, Indigenous research is considered to be research by and for Indigenous people using epistemologies and methodologies of that culture (Evans et al., 2009).

Decolonizing research has been thought of as a messy and potentially impossible feat but researchers agree that it is definitely worth pursuing (Swadener & Mutua, 2008). For example, decolonization has facilitated Indigenous people in rewriting history in a way that resonates for them (Baskin, 2003). Decolonizing research and processes have served to help structure curriculums within the education system as more and more academics acknowledge that space needs to be opened up for other knowledge systems. Therefore, the academy can serve as a site to create alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Baskin et al., 2008).

It is important to acknowledge that decolonizing research and the process of decolonization can have negative implications as well. Often unintentionally, negative implications can occur when further colonizing acts are perpetuated by the attitudes and beliefs that colonizers may carry with them (Reinsborough & Brandt, 2010). Therefore, it is a process that should not be taken lightly and should only be pursued with the utmost dedication and honesty.

I believe that in order to begin the process of decolonization, I need to understand what colonization is and how I have been implicated by it. I need to educate myself on what colonization has consisted of, what the consequences of it have been and understand the violence it continues to perpetuate in our society today. Attuned with this argument, Victor (2007) asserts that “an important part of the decolonizing journey is to come to understand the colonial process” (p. 7). I have been working on exploring my upbringing and education in this research as it relates to how I have become colonized and how I might be propagating the colonizer/colonized relationship.

This ability to step back and understand colonization from the position of the colonizer is an act that is based entirely upon our privileges as White people (Schmid, 2010). Schmid (2010, p. 176) states, “I continue to struggle with how one signals one’s willingness to step out of the position of privilege/dominance as far as one is able. I believe that the choice to do so itself is an act of privilege”. Similarly, my ability to step back to critically reflect on colonization requires the acknowledgement that I have the privilege to do so. I am in a very privileged position to be able to do this type of work and this is a large tension for me as a researcher, student, social worker, professional, partner, family member and friend.

I have worked towards uncovering how I have been raised in a colonial manner, but I also need to determine how colonization has impacted those who find themselves on the margins of the dominant social and academic paradigm. Understanding the history of the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people in the land that we call Canada is a beginning step to understanding the colonization that Indigenous people have

experienced and continue to experience. Education on past history can help professionals determine the harms that have been done to Indigenous people and other less dominant groups so that violence can be minimized as much as possible (Blackstock, 2009).

Many researchers have discovered that exploring colonization in other countries, such as Africa, has helped to expand their knowledge on colonization (Schmid, 2010). Colonization essentially consists of similar acts regardless of what country it is found in. Therefore, researching colonization in other countries may assist in learning how colonization has affected people in Canada. Once we understand the process of colonization, we can understand how different groups who have been colonized have been impacted and what the particular local consequences has been. Understanding colonization has allowed me to realise how I have come to be constructed and how others can be constructed as well. These reflections or discoveries are the responsibility of White, non-Indigenous people so that we can help to “dismantle” and “overturn” the European-dominated paradigm (Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Wilson, 2004).

Chapter 6: A Critical Understanding of Non-Indigenous History on This Land

One way to address disillusionment with the current situation and other forms of modern angst is to seek knowledge of the past.

(Haig-Brown & Nock, 2006, p. 6)

I have slowly been exposed to aspects of Indigenous culture through my relationship with my partner. I have been to different events, exposed to different foods such as traditional scone or fry bread, visited a number of reserves in Ontario and attended different cultural centres. However, I wanted to go beyond these preliminary encounters to gain a working grasp of Indigenous culture and history and how it influences the relationships that develop with non-Indigenous people. Therefore, I began researching information on Indigenous history from the perspective of how the encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have impacted Indigenous populations.

As I sat in the library and began to read about Indigenous history I could not help but wonder why I had not learned this information before. I reflected on my own education and wondered why this had been left out of my curricula. I wondered why I had learned about the history of this country mainly through a British lens with little to no insight into how colonization has affected other less dominant groups, such as Indigenous people. Regan (2010, p. 74) points out that “Canada’s national account remains very

much a celebratory settler story". In this way, the dominant account of this country's history is very much biased as it highlights the triumphs of the European settlers whilst ignoring or minimizing the impacts of European settlers on Indigenous populations. I think that many non-Indigenous people are unaware of the seemingly biased education we have received. As non-Indigenous people, we tend to ignore and disregard the privileges that we have had and we are unaware of how this has translated to our education system and ways of knowing.

I am no longer naïve or unaware of the true history that has occurred in this country. I challenge the readers of this research to also seek out the true history of this country, to re-educate themselves so that they are aware of the impacts of colonization and to acknowledge the lens that they carry with them because of it. In this reflexive process, one of the most important questions to consider is whether our lens is harmful or destructive to those we come into contact with.

This chapter will focus on exploring the history of the interactions between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people and how this has worked to shape the relationship that the two populations have developed today. I believe that it is important for White, non-Indigenous people to understand how their predecessors have interacted with Indigenous populations so that there is a historical reference to the colonization that has occurred. In doing so, this history may help in further understanding how Indigenous people have been colonized by European settlers.

I do not claim to know Indigenous history as I have not lived it and I am not an Indigenous person. More importantly, it is not mine to tell. This chapter is dedicated

solely to my understanding of the historical interactions between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people as written about in past and current literature. In particular, this chapter provides a limited scope as it focuses on this history as it pertains to the issue of colonization.

It has been documented that French and English settlers began flooding onto the eastern shore of this land between the 1400's and 1500's (Blackstock, 2009). Many first European people settled in and around the St. Lawrence River (Dickason & Newbigging, 2010). First relations between the Europeans and Indigenous populations were rather cordial and based mainly on trade relations (Blackstock, 2009). However, this soon changed as Europeans began exploiting Indigenous populations for their resources and conflict continued to arise as more Europeans arrived and attempted to settle into this land (Macionis & Gerber, 2008).

According to Dickason and Newbigging (2010), the British believed that Indigenous people could be developed and improved by assimilating them into British culture. This has become what is referred to as the "Indian problem". During this time, Indigenous people were subject to signing over much of their land to the British in exchange for several items, such as the insurance of protection. They were placed in portions of land that were not suitable or ideal for living and farming. Due to these undesirable conditions, Indigenous populations began to become "eradicated" from complications due to disease, lack of food and the violence that occurred between bands and the Europeans (Blackstock, 2009).

As interactions proceeded, the 1851 Act for Canada East was created and this became a way in which the government could push for a viable definition of the term “Indian” (Dickason & Newbigging, 2010). Without consultation from Indigenous populations, European descendants created their own conditions whereby one would be considered “Indian”. During this process, Indigenous people were classified as status and non-status “Indians”. This categorization continued with the creation of the 1876 Indian Act. This act further encouraged the assimilation of Indigenous people through way of legislation:

According to the Indian Act of 1876, a band is a body of Amerindians for whom the government has set aside lands for their common use and benefit; for whom the government is holding monies for their common use and benefit; or whom the Governor-in-Council has declared a band.

(Dickason & Newbigging, 2010, p. 198)

Over time Indigenous populations continued to face a loss of land and began to experience an even worsening of their situation. The government decided to further assimilate Indigenous people by forcing Indigenous children to attend schools to learn how to adopt the White way of living. Many churches were contracted to provide space for residential schools and as many as 80 residential schools were created (Crichlow, 2003). Indigenous children, aged 5-15, were sent to residential schools located far away

from their family and communities and were not allowed to exercise their Indigenous language, culture or tradition (Blackstock, 2009).

From 1863 to 1996, Indigenous children in residential schools were subjected to trauma, abuse, neglect and separation from family and culture that resulted in the death of many (Bombay, Matheson & Anisman, 2011; RCAP, 1996). The closure of residential schools finally began in the 1940's with the last residential school closing in Saskatchewan in 1996 (Blackstock, 2009). Indian residential schools taught Indigenous people that European knowledge was truth and that the European way of living was normative (Dumbrill & Green, 2008). The government believed that residential schools could teach Indigenous populations "civilized" White society as this was believed to be of benefit for both populations (Long & Sephton, 2011).

The impacts of colonization on Indigenous populations have been drastic and longstanding. Due to the impacts of this colonial history, there is now a distinction between registered or status Indians from those who are non-status. Registered or status Indians are registered with the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada which places them under the responsibilities of the Indian Act (Macionis & Gerber, 2008). Today, many Indigenous people do not have a lot of the rights and benefits that they should be entitled to and many Indigenous populations continue to be placed in situations where they have to fight for these rights and benefits.

As demonstrated from this chapter, Indigenous people have been subjected to the expectations of the colonial state and this has resulted in many negative consequences. We still see the impacts of this history today and non-Indigenous people have a

responsibility in this. Indigenous people are not going to disappear. In fact, their resiliency and self-determination is ever growing. It is the responsibility of the non-Indigenous people to remove the cloak of colonialism so that we can work towards better working relationships with Indigenous populations.

In Ontario, over 60% of Indigenous people currently live off-reserve and more Indigenous people are living in urban communities than ever before (Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2001). Due to the increasing number of Indigenous people living in urban areas, Indigenous people continue to receive services from more non-Indigenous people. Indigenous people fighting for their rights also often work with non-Indigenous people in regards to collaboration and working relationships with stakeholders, researchers and lawyers. Therefore, it is essential for non-Indigenous people to work towards providing service delivery for Indigenous people in a way that is appropriate for them.

Chapter 7: Partnering Working Relationships

Thus, our intention here is to make the argument that a scholarly encounter with indigenous knowledge can enrich the ways we engage in research and conceptualize education while promoting the dignity, self-determination, and survival of indigenous people.

(Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p.152)

Europeans have inflicted travesty on Indigenous peoples in the process of colonization. They have caused trauma, appropriated land, inflicted genocide and forced assimilation. The trauma of this interaction still causes societal, cultural, physical and health-related issues (Hodge, et al., 2009). Because of these traumas, Indigenous people often have to work with non-Indigenous researchers, organizations and funders in the social services and social justice fields. This is problematic as non-Indigenous people in the social services and social justice fields routinely operate from positions of colonial power which further perpetuate these issues and does not work to servicing Indigenous people from an Indigenous perspective.

There are non-Indigenous workers who respectfully and appropriately partner with Indigenous people and communities but there are many non-Indigenous people who still do not approach Indigenous populations in appropriate and respectful ways. Ineffective approaches are ones that only take into account Eurocentric ideologies to

shape their framework. It is my understanding that non-Indigenous people who have not worked with Indigenous populations in appropriate and respectful ways have done so because they are unaware of these issues and are not educated on the matter of colonialism.

There are several different types of working relationships that can occur when Indigenous and non-Indigenous people begin to work together and Davis (2010) identifies three types of these relationships. The first relationship is based on equality where both partners share the lead in determining the direction and outcome of the work involved. 'Paternalistic' relationships are the second type of relationship that can occur. In this type of relationship, colonial violence is perpetuated when non-Indigenous people work on the premise that they are superior and that they know what is best for their Indigenous partners. Finally, in the third relationship, Indigenous people avow their self-determination and take the lead in deciding what it is they need their non-Indigenous partners to work towards. In this relationship, non-Indigenous people remain one step behind Indigenous populations and follow their lead. Davis (2010) contends that these three types of relationships do not always occur independently of one another and can overlap and occur simultaneously.

Wikwemikong co-researchers believe that the development of friendships prior to the research, during the research and beyond the research is more important than developing positive research relationships (Blodgett et al., 2011). In other studies, it has been found that the connections that are made between American Indians and researchers are imperative to build authentic partnerships (Poupart, Baker & Horse, 2009).

Developing these types of “friendships” can be extremely problematic due to the distrust that Indigenous populations have historically had with non-Indigenous people. Margolin (1997) would consider this notion of forming “friendships” as a form of manipulation or coercion to capture information from Indigenous populations for the benefit of non-Indigenous researchers. In this light, the intentions behind an act of kindness or an attempt at friendship may differ depending on the person engaging in the “friendship”. These intentions could reflect a hierarchical assumption that non-Indigenous people can use their relationships with other populations to exploit or manipulate these resources.

Exploring what the term “friendship” would mean for Indigenous populations might help to mitigate these tensions that could arise in engaging in friendships in the Euro-Western sense. Further, researchers should explore their own intentions in the research that they do to ensure that they are engaging in research relationships that are not detrimental to Indigenous people. This would involve proper consultation with Indigenous populations to determine proper working relationships that are of benefit to them.

In my future work I hope to engage in working relationships that reflect the principle of equality but are also directed by the Indigenous people that I work with. It will be important for me to determine what Indigenous partners would expect from me in our working relationship. I acknowledge that I will need to adjust my approach to ensure that Indigenous populations are being serviced in appropriate and respectful ways and this will require direction from these Indigenous populations. I also acknowledge that it is problematic for non-Indigenous people to identify and define which kind of working

relationship they have with Indigenous people. Therefore, it will be important for non-Indigenous partners to consult with Indigenous people to determine if the working relationship is a positive one for them. In this light, I will be looking towards how Indigenous partners view our relationship in the future to determine if the working relationship is one that is of benefit to them.

I think that the identification of the working relationship exists is important in respect to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners. Non-Indigenous people who are quick to assert an “expert” role put the relationship at risk of being jeopardized. For example, non-Indigenous workers often use therapies that respond to issues in a way that further colonizes the Indigenous clients (Aguilera & Plasencia, 2005). This is a direct result of non-Indigenous professionals working from the reference that they are the expert. Aguilera and Plasencia (2005) have determined that programs were better suited for Indigenous populations when they addressed the historical trauma and oppression that has been experienced by Indigenous people.

I believe that the ways in which non-Indigenous people can work appropriately and respectfully with Indigenous populations are based on several components. Of these components, I would argue that the two most important involve an understanding of the culture, tradition and history of Indigenous populations as well as building and maintaining the most respectful relationships we can with Indigenous people. According to Regan (2010, p. 229), non-Indigenous people can “choose to live in truth” as allies. This requires listening to Indigenous testimonies of the past. This type of listening should

not be in an empathic way but a way that helps to further our own decolonization. In the words of this researcher:

In solving the settler problem, we would educate ourselves about the history of Indigenous-settler relations not only as it relates to residential schools but to the whole colonial project. We would learn about how the broken treaties, unresolved land claims, and conflicts over traditional lands and resource rights have a detrimental impact today. We would work in solidarity with Indigenous people to restory the IRS [Indian Residential Schools] history and legacy through ethical testimonial exchange and in public history and commemoration projects as part of national truth telling. We would commit ourselves to the ongoing struggle of reconciliation as liberatory resistance.

(Regan, 2010, p. 230)

I think this illuminates the importance of examining the relationships we build with Indigenous populations so that they reflect this “ally” position. Working in the margins is a complicated pursuit and it is important that relationships are constantly reflected on so that they are appropriate and respectful for both partners. Therefore, identifying the type of relationship that is developing from the position of the Indigenous partner could improve the work we do. By doing so, we can help minimize the potential problem of working from a place of authority that positions us as the expert.

Chapter 8: Interviews and Results

I conducted interviews with three participants. However, before I conducted my interviews I had an important discovery. In conversation with Indigenous academic, Bonnie Freeman, I asked her how she would describe non-Indigenous work to be “successful” with Indigenous populations to determine how she had chosen the potential sample population pool that I had recruited from. Through this conversation, I discovered that the way in which I was going to ask one of my questions was going to be problematic as it was not compatible with Indigenous worldviews, knowledge systems or ways of knowing. The question of debate was: “How do you view your own work as having relevance or as being “successful” with Indigenous communities?” It appeared that the term “successful” in this question had proven to be inappropriate.

In the way that the term “health” has not been transferable to some Indigenous communities in the past (Smylie, Williams & Cooper, 2006), I realised that this was a term that I should not be using in my research as it was also not translatable to Indigenous culture. I could not measure or account for apples when I was really looking at oranges. However, this question had been sent out in the sample interview guide prior to the start of my first interview so I was unable to deviate too much from this question in my interviews. I needed to consult with Bonnie Freeman to determine next steps.

In exploring what the term “successful” meant with Bonnie Freeman, I learned that this term originates from a Euro-Western perspective which is why it had no real

transferable definition in Indigenous culture. Due to its inability to transfer from culture to culture, it became apparent that the use of the word “successful” with Indigenous populations would not be accurate in describing their relationships with non-Indigenous people.

This dilemma appeals to the differences that generally exist between Indigenous and more dominant knowledge systems and ways of knowing. More dominant knowledge systems tend to seek out measurements in their evaluations whereas less dominant knowledge systems do not. As someone who has been brought up in the dominant paradigm, I was seeking ways in which I could measure the relationship between my participants and Indigenous populations. I acknowledge that my tendency to do so is a direct result of being part of the dominant paradigm.

Bonnie revealed that Indigenous communities would consider a partnership with non-Indigenous workers to be “successful” in the Euro-Western sense when the partnership was based on a good relationship. Therefore, it was the quality of the relationship that should be used to measure these partnerships. I realised that it would be important to address this with my participants so that my research could have some relevance for Indigenous populations.

Determining the appropriate language to use when conducting research is not isolated to this project. Similarly, Davis (2010) also discovered the discrepancy of terminology that can occur when Indigenous and non-Indigenous people work together. Davis (2010) wanted to determine how non-Indigenous people could build “alliances” and “coalitions” with Indigenous communities on the West coast but she ran into a

roadblock when she learned that this word was not transferable from a First Nations leader. This First Nations leader preferred to use the term “partnerships” to refer to working relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. These crucial differences in language are imperative to explore and attempt to understand when working as an outsider to a community.

I knew that it would be important to establish how to formulate my question in my consultations with Bonnie Freeman. I wanted to determine how I could still ask the question in a way that the saliency of “success” would be de-emphasized. The insight that I had received from this academic seemed to coincide with the research that I had encountered; the quality of the relationship between two partners was the most important indicator. Bonnie explained to me that there are certain qualities that can be found within relationships that are dependent on the values and principles that each individual person holds. Examples of these qualities are honesty, trust, respect, caring, compassion, and humility. Therefore, if a relationship is “successful” in the Euro-Western sense it would need to consist of having these types of qualities from an Indigenous perspective.

Other researchers contend that the concept of relatedness is a primary value for Indigenous people and respectful relationships should represent the element of reciprocity in order to have value (Baskin et al., 2008). Non-Indigenous people should be conscious of these values and principles when engaging in relationships with Indigenous populations. This often extends beyond the scope of what non-Indigenous people have identified working relationships with others to be. This is important because it has been

common for Indigenous communities to be distrustful of non-Indigenous researchers and professionals because of past history.

Researchers working with Indigenous communities may also need to go outside dominant ways of knowing and methodologies to conduct research that is culturally sensitive and respectful of Indigenous culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Therefore, non-Indigenous researchers should not seek “success” with their research interests involving Indigenous populations but seek partnerships and relationships that are respectful to these populations. By doing so, we can work towards building future reciprocal relationships that can assist both populations.

I was aware that the term “successful” may not be viable for my research but my participants had already been given the sample questions. In an attempt to preserve consistency, I continued to ask the question using the word “successful”. To mitigate the problems with this term I openly discussed the tensions I had with it when I asked this question. I hoped that this would encourage my participants to explore what the term “successful” meant to them in the context of working with Indigenous people as a non-Indigenous person. I hoped to reveal how these non-Indigenous participants viewed their work as being appropriate and respectful to Indigenous populations and how they went about measuring their relationships with Indigenous populations.

I interviewed three non-Indigenous participants. Two participants have experience in conducting research with Indigenous populations. One of these participants had done some research work regarding poverty and health in First Nations communities. This participant had also looked at the relationships that exist between non-Indigenous and

Indigenous people in a small community in regards to identity, bridges and boundaries. In their research, they also wanted to determine what the sources of conflict and division were within this smaller community and how these two groups could build positive, mutually respectful relationships with one another. The second of these participants has done most of their research work with Indigenous communities and often worked with them in order to obtain additional funding or resources. According to this participant, a lot of this type of research fell into the domains of social policy and community development work.

The remaining participant has experience in working in a liaison-type role with Indigenous populations. This participant worked to help alleviate tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that was mounting due to a pending land claim dispute. This participant acted as a liaison between the two communities to help build bridges and provide information to those affected or interested.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour with one interview extending to two hours. After transcribing and analyzing the data using elements of grounded theory, several important and critical themes emerged. A lot of the emergent themes remained consistent with current literature and were also quite compatible with my own tensions and challenges in working and thinking across difference.

One of the dominating themes revealed that all of the participants agreed that working with Indigenous populations as a non-Indigenous person was not without tension. As a White, non-Indigenous person, these tensions were great. One participant stated,

Canadians are incredibly oblivious to the issue of First Nations people... the White guy has been trying to solve the problems for a long time and that hasn't worked out overly well.

This speaks to the conflict that is present due to the historical violence and oppression that has been experienced by Indigenous populations. Another participant explained that “there were certain processes that enable many White people to maintain racist views even though they might have friends who are Native or who might have Native people in their family”. The third participant spoke to the feelings that I have regarding the research,

I don't want to be, you know, the White, Ontario person who just says, oh geeze, this is wrong, right, but I don't know what to do.

As White, non-Indigenous people, it is hard to navigate how to approach other groups in which there has been historical conflict. This conflict has led to the large tensions that exist.

All agreed that, as non-Indigenous people, we do not have the knowledge of what it is like to be Indigenous and we will never know it from the location of an Indigenous person. One participant spoke to this when they stated “I don't have the history of a people that have been so systematically oppressed”. Another revealed,

I didn't learn much of this stuff [Indigenous history and knowledge] growing up, either about sort of Indigenous ways of knowing, or methodologies, epistemologies or of the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada, treaties and residential schools.

Because of this, the work that is done between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is challenging and is not easily reconcilable. Although these tensions were real and ever present, all participants spoke to the fact that they wanted to do something.

Representative of this was one participant's comments:

You know what, you're part of that non-Native community. It's your responsibility to do something there. It's not enough to feel guilty or to feel sad. How's that gonna change anything right?

Again, this participant has highlighted the tensions that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and of not fully understanding what non-Indigenous people's roles are within this.

Another theme that kept reoccurring is the acknowledgement of privilege. One participant had been told by an Indigenous person whom she was working with to acknowledge her privilege. She explained that she had to go back and think about what

her privilege was so that she was fully able to do this. I believe that this is an important first step in learning to work and think across difference.

According to one participant, they felt that they were embodying everything about the White settler culture that had colonized Indigenous populations. Because of this, they realised that sometimes they represented the face of the European descendents that had attempted to assimilate Indigenous populations. This is invaluable information as we need to be aware that our appearance alone can impact the way in which we are received. When we approach Indigenous people, we need to be cognizant of the implications that we carry with us as White, non-Indigenous people that may influence our working relationships with them. One of the participants recommended that White, non-Indigenous people should become familiar with anti-racism principles as a way to mitigate some of these tensions. These principles help to unpack the privilege that we inherently carry. Another participant spoke to this quite well:

Be aware that that's the role you are playing and then when you're aware of the role you're playing, I think you'll be a lot more conscious of not putting them [Indigenous people] in a role either but being respectful of what is important to them.

Therefore, having an understanding of our own privilege will then allow us, as non-Indigenous people, to be aware of how this will impact how we interact with others.

All three participants discussed the importance of understanding the diversity of Indigenous populations. This is an observation that I came across time and again in my literature review. It speaks to the fact that we can never underestimate the diversity of Indigenous populations. Participants agreed that this is one of the most important things that non-Indigenous people need to be aware of when first exploring appropriate ways to work with Indigenous populations. Using my own review of the literature, I have come across the variability in customs that differ depending on the different Indigenous populations. For example, some First Nations bands expect the offering of tobacco in exchange for information or a favour. One participant suggested that non-Indigenous people should have a “good understanding of the local context, that every community is unique in some respects and there’s a history”. I think these are excellent points as we will never truly understand another culture but we can do our best to learn enough about it to be respectful in our relationships with them.

One participant talked about the notion of a “spectrum” and how it can be useful in exploring different Indigenous populations. He stressed that if you do not have some indication of the differences you will quickly fail if you assume that you are serving a “static entity”. This participant maintained that: “Because if you are a clinical social worker again, and somebody Aboriginal walks through the door, what set of assumptions are you bringing to that?” These findings were consistent with my argument that when we work with Indigenous populations as non-Indigenous people, we run the risk of essentializing them.

Another participant emphasized that “you can never know the different culture. You can be respectful of it. Even if you do know it, it doesn’t apply to everybody”. Therefore, there is no one way that non-Indigenous people should learn to work with Indigenous populations. I think that this is a very important realization. We need to be conscious, as social workers and as other working professionals, that what may work for one person may not work for another. I think that this is a basic premise that anyone should be aware of when attempting to work and think across difference.

In regards to education, all of the participants acknowledged that they had not learned about Indigenous culture, history and ways of knowing in their education. One of the participants stated that it “seemed like a huge gap in [their] education”. One recommendation that seemed to resonate across all of the participant’s responses was to research the community in which you are working with. Self-education about the local context seemed to be an important step prior to approaching the community of interest. Learning the differences that exist between cultures and knowledge systems appeared to be a necessary step towards being respectful to that community for a couple of these participants.

I also wanted to explore how my participants viewed the differences between Indigenous ways of knowing and dominant ways of knowing. By doing so, I wanted to examine how these differences could potentially affect the working dynamic between these different groups. My participants had different perspectives on how they viewed the differences and similarities to be. One participant recognized that Indigenous researchers and non-Indigenous researchers can differ in regards to methodology. This participant

saw this difference as resembling the same differences that exist between quantitative and qualitative research. He found that he was seeking more numerical data in his research while the Indigenous researcher did not consider this type of data to be as important. There were certain things that the Indigenous researcher did not need to prove in the same way.

Another participant viewed Indigenous knowledge systems as more holistic, fluid, cyclical and interdependent. He saw this knowledge system as placing a greater emphasis on relationships, experiential knowledge, and local knowledge and there seemed to be an importance on the cycle of life. For this participant, this differed from mainstream knowledge systems as it is characterized as linear, more individualistic with an emphasis on empirical facts and logic that encourages the search for universal truths. This participant stated that, “if you are working with Indigenous communities you have to... come to some understanding of their ways of knowing as well and incorporate that in some ways into the research.” Exploring other ways of knowing and knowledge systems could be considered a step towards being directed by what is important to the community in which you are working with.

Interestingly, all of the participants did not view their own ways of knowing as being completely disengaged from Indigenous ways of knowing. For instance, one participant spoke to the fact that there are ways of knowing that exist within the dominant paradigm that are compatible with Indigenous ways of knowing. This participant identified their knowledge systems as having several different influences including

pragmatist philosophy which believes that there can be multiple perspectives and not one single truth. They said,

So, I mean I'm not an Indigenous person. It's only been in the last few years that I've come to understand more about Indigenous ways of knowing. Before that, I had been influenced by pragmatist philosophy and sort of, some of these, non-dominant ways of knowing in mainstream society that has some connections between those and Indigenous knowledge systems which was really exciting to me.

Another participant did not believe that they fell into the dominant knowledge paradigm which made opening up to other knowledge systems an easier task. Therefore, I realised that the dominant and Indigenous ways of knowing were not completely disengaged and that there were some overlap between the two.

As Weaver and Congress (2009, p. 167) point out, "In many respects the value system of the social work profession and the values of indigenous people are compatible". The researchers indicate that the values of respect and caring cross the boundaries between the field of social work and Indigenous populations. Using a social work framework in learning how to work and think across difference could potentially assist in moving away from dominant knowledge systems to ones that put the individual, their environment and their context in the forefront (Weaver & Congress, 2009).

As anticipated, the intangibility of the term “success” surfaced throughout all three of the interviews. Participants were encouraged to explore what the term “success” meant for them in the context of the work they have done with Indigenous populations. There were a variety of responses and each of them had a strong connection with the type of work that they had experienced.

One participant often worked with Indigenous populations in a research capacity that involved working towards attaining increased resources. This participant measured how “successful” he was based on whether that community had received the increased resources. He also spoke to the importance of being invited by the community to do more research. In his words, “if I was doing mediocre work, I just would not get invited to do more work... But I have been invited back”. He found that the feedback he received from the Indigenous communities he has conducted research with has been generally good.

A similar type of measurement was used by another participant as he found that the response from the community had “been largely very positive and supportive”. He felt that the fact that he had interested parties from the community who were willing to engage with the research and participate in dialogue with others was another indication that the research he was conducting was useful for that community. This is highlighted in his statement:

If through this, at least a few people [non-Indigenous] understood what racism is, what colonialism is, what impact that has had on Indigenous communities and what responsibilities they have in terms of dealing with

that today and changing their own attitudes and behaviours to develop a more respectful relationship with Indigenous peoples today and into the future... I will have had some success with what I've done.

One of the participants did not agree with the term “success” and grappled with how their work with Indigenous populations might be measured in this way. They preferred the term “constructive” as they thought that it was generally less judgemental and that it had the potential to create less harm. This participant considered her work to be constructive with Indigenous populations because of the “trust and relationships to this day-both ways”. She stated that “I could measure the success because I know how much I've learned and grown, how my perceptions have changed, widened, fallen away...”

The feedback from all of the participants definitely pertains to the fact that “successful”, “relevant” or “constructive” relationships only exist when there are positive relationships that are developed and nurtured between both partners. Importantly, these relationships need to work for the Indigenous populations that are involved so that they are valuable for their communities. Through these relationships, trust can be built and maintained so that both partners can work together to accomplish goals.

In attempting to work and think across difference, I have found myself being weary of approaching concepts that are unknown to me for the fear that I will come across as being disrespectful or ignorant. An important recommendation that two of the participants made was to not be afraid of taking risks. I think this is a large concern for any person attempting to work and think across difference as it speaks to the hesitancy

people face when they are wanting to work with others but do not know how to go about doing it. However, these two participants stressed that it is important that we continue to take risks and to not be afraid of making mistakes. One participant spoke to this tension quite well,

“As the average person does, in our culture, we are raised to be smart, we are raised to know the answers in school. And to be stupid, you feel uncomfortable. Yet, I realised that in order to learn, I would have to take risks and be vulnerable and be able to deal with it, and to deal with their reaction.”

This participant acknowledged that she was going to put her foot in her mouth and that this may be inevitable sometimes. She explained that we can do our best not to but it is possible because we are “treading on ground” that we do not completely understand or know. I think this is an important point to make. Oftentimes, we do not attempt something because we are afraid of failure. These participants have acknowledged that the process may be messy and may not be perfect but that we cannot let that stop us from doing the work that we do.

It is important to note that the ability to take risks does come from a position of privilege. However, when it is stated that we should not be afraid of taking risks, it is not insinuating that we *should* take risks. It is acknowledging that we cannot let our own fears of engaging in this type of work overshadow the work that can be done. I have

previously mentioned that non-Indigenous people have a role in this issue and we (non-Indigenous people) have responsibilities because of it. When we do not pursue what our role is in this then we remain passive and silent. The primary issue is how non-Indigenous people can look at the “Colonizer Problem” within themselves and this does require risks in order to tackle this contentious issue. Therefore, when the use of the word “risk” arises, it is pointing towards the work that non-Indigenous people need to engage in with themselves so that appropriate and respectful relationships can be built with Indigenous populations.

The final recommendation that was striking among the participants was the need to continually return to the community you are working with in order to check in. This helps to ensure that a relationship is maintained and that lines of communication are kept open. One participant said that checking in is extremely important so that you do not get caught making assumptions. Another participant stressed that continuing to be in dialogue with the intended community is important to get the feedback needed to direct the work you are doing to make sure you are on track. He stated, “I would emphasize in terms of doing research with these communities is to have this ongoing process of communication and relationship and getting feedback from people and letting them know where you are in the process”. He spoke to the fact that this was very important for the legitimacy and credibility as a researcher.

The themes that emerged from these interviews provided invaluable advice and insight for people attempting to work and think across difference. There is much to be learned from here. These participants have managed to work and think in the margins and

have done so in appropriate and respectful ways. In regards to their own research, one participant mentioned,

The focus was not on the so called “Indian Problem”, that is was on the “White Problem” of racism. So, the focus was really on looking at how White people view Indigenous people and their attitudes and assumptions and the way that they relate to people.

This is an excellent point as it really speaks to the real work that needs to be done for non-Indigenous people looking to work and think across difference. I think that this advice is also important in working with groups or cultures other than Indigenous populations as it pertains to the tensions in working and thinking across difference in general. For me, these participants have confirmed ever more that this work is important and that it is not an impossible task.

Chapter 9: Analysis and Discussion

To work effectively in the American Indian community one must have a working knowledge of the community.

(Poupart, et al., 2009)

All of the themes that emerged from the interviews recognized the difficulty that people face when they attempt to work and think across difference. Obviously there is no one solution or recommendation that we should take away from this. However, there are overarching themes and advice that can be useful for social workers, working professionals and interested parties who are attempting to work and think across difference. Overall, treating someone as the expert in their own lives is important. We can help understand this better by educating ourselves on the person's local context. We need to also be cognizant that this is complicated work that contains much risk, but it is a challenge worth pursuing.

As White, non-Indigenous people, we need to apologize when we put our foot in our mouths and we need to acknowledge our privilege when we work with less dominant or marginalized populations. It is important to realise that apologizing will never be enough and because of this, we have the responsibility to work towards disrupting the mechanisms that enable privilege. We need to build relationships and establish trust so that a longstanding partnership can ensue. These are our starting blocks and we should be

constantly building on them so that we are always working towards maintaining appropriate and respectful working relationships in the future.

This country has historically taken the approach of working towards fixing the “Indian Problem”. It is my hope that this research will encourage others to disregard the illusion that there is an “Indian Problem” and to work towards resolving the “Colonizer Problem” instead. Working on the “Colonizer Problem” by decolonizing ourselves and using these recommendations may lead to learning our own ways in which we can work and think across difference. As a result, learning how to rethink about ourselves can assist in moving towards better working relationships with others. Regan (2010, p. 41) states that,

“...settlers who have hitherto relied upon colonial ways of knowing Indians empathetically in order to solve the Indian problem must enter willingly into a more vulnerable, unsettling space of not knowing as we listen to Indigenous testimonies and share our own.”

This author goes on to say that the education of these principles should result in a transformative shift. This is something that resonated with my own learning process. Early on in the research process, I realised that I can attempt to learn all I can about Indigenous people and culture but, at the end of the day, I will never truly have the grasp that Indigenous people have. However, through my education and learning, I have discovered aspects of myself that I was unaware of before. These discoveries have helped

me to understand potentially new ways of being White that may be compatible in working with Indigenous populations and other marginalized groups. I have realised that there are parts of me and my own ways of knowing that can be compatible with Indigenous ways of knowing. I can use these parts of myself to work towards appropriate and respectful ways in which to work with Indigenous populations. In this light, I have not adopted a new lens; I have modified my own. The decolonization process is an ongoing process that requires constant attention and reflection. I have learned that I constantly need to check my assumptions, values and beliefs to ensure that I am mitigating the risks that can occur in this type of work. Using these starting points, non-Indigenous people can learn to work with less dominant populations in ways that are useful for them.

According to Pol Neveu (2010), non-Indigenous people should continue relations with Indigenous communities to work towards self-determination. The role of non-Indigenous people in this relationship is to honour the capability of decision-making that Indigenous people have whilst maintaining open lines of communication. Self-determination is a principle that has been shown to be very important for Indigenous populations and non-Indigenous people who work with Indigenous populations need to respect this. Self-determination includes constructing ways of knowing which can then be used to challenge more dominant ways of knowing (Smylie et al., 2006). Therefore, self-determination can encourage decolonizing processes that further help non-Indigenous people in working with Indigenous populations.

As suggested in the interview results, non-Indigenous people should learn to create space for other ways of knowing by engaging in the education of the Other. Educating oneself about the community in which you work is helpful to gain a working knowledge of that particular community (Poupart et al., 2009). This coincides with the views of one of the participants who believed that learning the local context is important when you engage in research or work with different groups and communities. In the future, I will ensure that I gain a working knowledge of the community that I attempt to work with. This may include learning about different ways in which these populations would like to be serviced. For instance, some researchers have found that non-Indigenous professionals who incorporate helping and wellness models created by Indigenous people with Indigenous clients are more 'successful' in their practice with Indigenous communities (Hodge et al., 2009).

In addition, it is important to note that professionals are responsible for ensuring that the Indigenous model that they work into their practice is reflective of the local Indigenous community. Although this does not help the broader issue of policies and program development, it does provide recommendations for the practitioner-client relationship at the front-line level of social work. I think that by incorporating more Indigenous-created programs and models into service delivery, we can potentially make room for other less dominant programs and models.

According to Lynn (2001, p. 914), "educators and practitioners must rethink their approaches not only to accommodate and promote the growing understanding of Indigenous practices but also to valorise the theory and practice of Indigenous people as

significant sites of learning for western social work”. Lynn (2001) proposes that practitioners and researchers must engage in critical reflexive thinking about their practice in order to open up their repertoire to include other worldviews and other marginalized practices. She believes that this will force a shift in the current paradigm so that other cultures can become more visible. This resonates with my own views as I believe that creating space at the front line level can encourage more space at more macro levels. Other researchers agree that there needs to be a shift in the policies and programs that are developed in order to initiate change at the front-line levels (Getty, 2010; Vickers, 2002). They believe that there needs to be a decolonization of the current academic paradigm and that change on all levels will only occur when this happens. This bottom-up approach could prove to be an important site of resistance for working and thinking across difference.

There are obviously barriers to all of these recommended solutions but I believe there is value in them nonetheless. I believe that there needs to be change from both top-down and bottom-up approaches. For instance, policies and programs need to be re-developed to take into account different values and knowledge systems while practitioners also have the responsibility of ensuring that their practice is culturally-appropriate and does not perpetuate the oppressive colonizer/colonized relationship.

In relation to my own journey, I have learned more about myself and my social and cultural location than about Indigenous culture and history. Learning about the Other is an important process but we can never truly know the Other. We can learn to be respectful of what we can know about the Other. This type of learning about the self is

crucial to this type of work. I have learned that I have not always been cognizant of my social and cultural position. I have not always acknowledged the privileges that I have and continue to receive. Today, I am much more cognizant of my position in the colonizer/colonized relationship and how it impacts those that I encounter.

Being cognizant of my position has helped me to uncover colonization and how I can work towards decolonizing myself. One participant shared a story with me in which they described their experience in working alongside a First Nations leader. This First Nations leader told this participant that, “one thing that non-Indigenous people... that White people need to recognize is that they were colonized themselves... If you really trace your ancestry and look back through European history, we all have Indigenous roots.” I think that many non-Indigenous people are seemingly unaware of this. As a non-Indigenous person of European background, I have been colonized and I have had a part in my own colonization. I think that non-Indigenous people who do not acknowledge this run the risk of assuming that the dominant ways of knowing and being are “normal”. I have learned a lot about the way that I have been shaped and how this has impacted my own assumptions, beliefs and values that I bring to the world.

Now that I have a better understanding of myself and how I can work towards decolonizing myself, I need to take the next step in my professional and personal life. I will be entering a new position in the social work field shortly and this will be an opportunity to take what I have learned and to use it. It will be important to engage in frequent critical reflection so that I can maintain the decolonizing process that I have

initiated in this research. This will require a constant check of what assumptions and beliefs I bring to each situation that I find myself in.

The knowledge that I have sought out has been transformative. I have realised that, although working and thinking across difference is quite complex, we need to be conscious that everyone is different and that we need to approach our working relationships with each person in this way. Culture and history is one part of it but we need to work with others from the perspective that they truly are the experts in their own lives. This research offers insight into how we can go beyond what good social work is. Most importantly, as social workers, we need to be open to other definitions of what good social work can be. We also need to rethink who defines what good social work is. In regards to this research on Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations, the dominant social work paradigm needs to move over to make space for Indigenous populations. In this space, Indigenous populations should define what good social work is to them so that non-Indigenous social workers, professionals and interested parties can follow suit. In this way, non-Indigenous people are not forging the path towards good social work with Indigenous populations; they are following a path that is directed by Indigenous populations so that the work that is done is appropriate and respectful for them.

I had learned to approach my job in the social work field in valuable and insightful ways through my education, but I believe that education and practice can be substantially different. In my case, it definitely was and I seemed to have lost my social work values and beliefs that I had acquired. I believe that it will be imperative for me to

create time for self-reflection and critical thinking in whatever position I hold in the future so that I can do good social work.

Conclusion

Overall, I have learned that there are ways of knowing that I possess that are compatible with Indigenous ways of knowing. The epistemologies that I relate to are ones that could be considered less dominant and I think this has also helped me in the decolonization process. I have been able to dissect my beliefs and values that have been created through my upbringing and education. The lens in which I view the world has been widened and I believe that I am now more open to new knowledge systems and ways of knowing.

My research thesis accounts for only one step towards the long process of decolonization, respectful practice and social justice for non-Indigenous people in working with Indigenous populations. It marks a beginning step in this decolonizing process and creates the landscape for future steps. This research project was an incredible journey for me, as a researcher and as a social worker, in working and thinking across difference. However, there were definitely some limitations in this research project. Engaging the Indigenous community would have been ideal in determining what would be appropriate for this type of practice. Unfortunately, I had to do my best with the time constraints of the Master's thesis. More inclusion of an Indigenous voice is important in determining appropriate and respectful ways in which to work and think across difference. Therefore, it would be important for future research projects to examine these issues with the inclusion of this voice so that this perspective can be heard.

Another limitation to this research is the way in which I used my stories. According to Terry Tempest Williams (1984), “we are not Navajo... their traditional stories don’t work for us. Their stories hold meaning for us only as examples. They can teach us what is possible. We must create our own stories”. This author argues that we need to be careful that we do not emulate other cultures and that we respect the knowledge systems of other cultures. In this light, my way of disseminating the research could potentially be considered an appropriation of Indigenous knowledge and culture. I view my own stories as having meaning for myself. When they are used in conjunction with other non-Indigenous people’s stories they can be used to build pathways to new knowledge and insight. As mentioned, future projects would benefit from the inclusion of Indigenous stories so that pathways can continue to be built. This is in agreement with Barton (2004) that using stories can help create bridges between people and Regan (2010) who states that this type of research should reflect both survivor and perpetrator stories.

Despite these limitations, it is hoped that my research will allow other social workers, professionals and interested parties in their attempts in working and thinking across difference. As Regan (2010) points out, non-Indigenous people need not get caught up in resolving the “Indian Problem” as it is actually the settler problem that requires their attention. As non-Indigenous social workers, professionals and people, we need to understand that we should not attempt to “fix” anything, but rather focus on working on ourselves. This work involves education on colonization and an acknowledgement of its impacts.

It has been an uneasy pursuit but I have grown substantially because of it. I have essentially learned new ways of being myself that are compatible with other worldviews, knowledge systems and ways of knowing. Hopefully, others can also see the world through a widened lens and they, too, can explore other ways of being themselves.

My partner recently proposed to me on a trip to New York City. We will be getting married within the next year or so. I will be spending my life with someone who is Indigenous and our children will also be Indigenous. Because of this, I will never be at the end of my journey and rightfully so. A journey such as this is one that needs to be nurtured and tended to in order for it to continue to grow and flourish. I will never understand what it is like to be Indigenous, nor will I ever fully understand Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing. I understand more now than I ever have before and I think that this may be a good starting place. There may be other non-Indigenous researchers out there who may feel uncomfortable with pursuits such as this one but I would like to expose that I, too, was quite uncomfortable when I began this journey. This discomfort has never left and I do not expect it to. I cannot change my social location but I certainly need to consistently acknowledge it. This represents one of my paths forward and I want to extend my research to all people who would like to attempt to work and think across difference.

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Appendix A

Letter of Information and Consent Form

LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

A Study of Working and Thinking across Difference: A White Social Worker and an Indigenous World

Investigators:

Principal/Student Investigator:

Rebecca Haigh
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Purpose of the Study

You are invited to take part in this study exploring the work that white non-Indigenous people must engage in to prepare themselves for working or engaging with Indigenous knowledge systems or people in a respectful and non-colonizing manner. This study represents the thesis component of my Master's program at McMaster University.

I would like to explore how you work with Indigenous communities as a non-Indigenous person. My study is NOT seeking to understand Indigenous ways of being, but instead understanding non-indigenous ways that are compatible with working respectfully with Indigenous communities.

Procedures involved in the Research

I am looking for information regarding your experience in working/interacting/corresponding with Indigenous communities as a non-Indigenous person. I am looking to have semi-structured interviews with you that will last anywhere from thirty minutes to two hours in length. The location of the interviews will be of your choosing and of a place in which you feel comfortable. I will be guiding the interview based upon a set of questions and I have attached an interview guide so that you can have a chance to review the types of questions that might be discussed. With your permission, I would like to audio-tape the interview and take notes during the interview. I would also like the opportunity for a follow-up telephone conversation in which I can review the accuracy of my interpretation(s) of your discussion points.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:

It is not likely that there will be any harms or discomforts from and/or associated with this study, but you do need to be aware that topics that will be discussed could elicit some discomfort. However, potential discomforts could occur during the revealing of information, worldviews and opinions. To review whether

this may make you feel uncomfortable, a list of sample questions that I expect to help guide the interview has been attached.

You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable and you can withdraw (stop taking part) at any time. I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy.

Potential Benefits

The research will not benefit you directly. I hope that it may provide a benefit to non-Indigenous people in working with Indigenous communities as a step towards being able to do this successfully and in a way that is respectful to Indigenous communities. This may also lead to a step toward a better working relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people or even of people attempting to work across difference.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to protect (guarantee) your confidentiality and privacy. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified.

However, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell and others may be able to identify you on the basis of references you make. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me.

The information/data you provide will be kept in a locked desk/cabinet where only I will have access to it. Information kept on a computer will be protected by a secure and encrypted password. Once the study has been completed, the data that has been obtained will be destroyed.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to be part of the study, you can decide to stop (withdraw), at any time, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study. You should be advised that withdrawal will no longer be possible after the results have been compiled for analysis.

Information about the Study Results

I expect to have this study completed by approximately August 2012. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at haighrs@mcmaster.ca and/or 705-868-0165.

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
C/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Rebecca Haigh of McMaster University. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested. I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have been given a copy of this form. I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded.

... *Yes.*

... *No.*

2. ...Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to this email address _____

or to this mailing address: _____

... *No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.*

**Appendix B
Recruitment Email Poster**



**NON-INDIGENOUS PARTICIPANTS NEEDED
FOR
RESEARCH**

We are looking for non-Indigenous volunteers to take part in **A Study of Working and Thinking across Difference: A White Social Worker and an Indigenous World**

You would be asked to participate in an interview discussing your experiences and views on working and thinking across differences; namely you will be asked to discuss your experiences in working with Indigenous communities as a non-Indigenous person.

Your participation would involve one interview session which will last anywhere from thirty minutes to two hours in length. Your participation may also include a follow-up phone call to ensure the accuracy of your participation.

Please note that this study is only looking to recruit non-Indigenous participants.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,
please contact:

Rebecca Haigh

Social Work Department at McMaster University

705-868-0165 or

Email: haighrs@mcmaster.ca

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance
by the McMaster Research Ethics Board.

Appendix C**Sample Interview Guide*****Interview Questions*****A Study of Working and Thinking across Difference: A White Social Worker and an Indigenous World****Rebecca Haigh, (Master of Social Work student)****(Department of Social Work – McMaster University)**

Information about these interview questions: This gives you an idea what I would like to learn about your experiences in working with Indigenous communities as a non-Indigenous person. Interviews will be one-to-one and will be open-ended (not just “yes or no” answers). Because of this, the exact wording may change a little. Sometimes I will use other short questions to make sure I understand what you told me or if I need more information when we are talking such as: (“*So, you are saying that ...?*”), to get more information (“*Please tell me more?*”), or to learn what you think or feel about something (“*Why do you think that is...?*”).

- 1) In what capacity do you work with Indigenous communities?**
- 2) Do you think that as a non-Indigenous person working with an Indigenous community, that this difference might pose a barrier in working successfully with Indigenous communities?**
- 3) Have you found instances in which you needed to decolonize yourself in order to respectfully work with Indigenous communities? How do you navigate tensions in working within this space?**
- 4) How do you view your own work as having relevance or as being “successful” with Indigenous communities?**
- 5) What recommendations do you have for non-Indigenous people in working with Indigenous populations?**

6) Is there something important we forgot? Is there anything else you think I need to know about working with Indigenous communities as non-Indigenous people?