

An Indigenous Methodology for Coming to Know
Milo Pimatisiwin as Land-Based Initiatives for Indigenous Youth

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To my Nieces and Nephews.

You inspire me every day to live my roles and responsibilities as Auntie.

Abstract

This research endeavour with Moose Cree First Nation provides insights into how emerging Indigenous methodologies are fundamentally grounded in an Indigenous epistemology that, for the purpose of this project, was found to be integral to youth and community wellbeing. More specifically, this project highlights an Indigenous perspective of health and wellbeing, *milo pimatisiwin*, that yields individual, collective and relational strengths with its focus on reconnecting youth to the land. This thesis offers methodological contributions in an effort to discuss research with Indigenous peoples beyond the participatory paradigm; it also develops on coming to know through the “visiting way” and elaborates further on Indigenous methods such as learning by doing concepts and conversational method. Discussing approaches of coloniality and settler-colonialism highlighted territoriality and land dispute issues, but most importantly here, these approaches established how the land is at the very core of the Ojibwe people’s epistemology. Two land-based initiatives with Moose Cree First Nation were examined in this study. The initiatives provide insights into Indigenous resurgence as they relate to the land, to spirit, and to life stage teachings. The community experiences suggest how vital it is to center Indigenous knowledge in research and land-based initiatives for youth wellbeing as they contribute to developing, integrating and applying Indigenous methodologies, given this process is inter-related to fostering *milo pimatisiwin*. The Ojibwegowuk people’s conceptions of health and wellbeing challenges colonial ideas and actions, and just as important, it allows for the production of knowledge within the context of Indigenous methods, experiences and wisdom.

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My contribution as the first author is research initiation, design, literature review, data gathering, data analysis, drafting, interpretation, critical and final revisions and ongoing communication with publisher. The second author contributed to the development of the research project such as the application of *milo pimatisiwin* teachings at the John Delaney Youth Center, participant observation, project vision and management, design of evaluation tool, and final review and approval of the revisions.

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In Indigenous community we often talk about the significance of circle. There exist many forms and layers in the formation of circles. Within an Indigenous research methodology, there are a series of concentric circles with a common centre, the land. This thesis is guided by the way of visiting. I begin by giving thanks to my mother.

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Introduction

During my first visit with the people of Moose Factory, the community was bustling with their annual cultural gathering and home coming (the Gathering of our People, or GOOP). Moose Cree First Nation, was one of the first four communities involved in the pilot project to design programming for Indigenous youth in partnership with Right To Play¹, a not-for-profit sport for development organization. I was a member of the research team from the School of Human Kinetics (University of Ottawa) that worked with Right To Play (RTP) and the partnering Indigenous communities. The aim of our research partnership was to help build more meaningful and relevant programs for Indigenous youth through a series of multidisciplinary analyses and case studies.

Since 2011, the University of Ottawa research group was involved in various training and youth symposiums that brought together a diversity of Indigenous youth and community mentors. My initial research project was to explore the focus on Indigenous cultural knowledge within the context of these recreation and play-based programs. At one of the Right To Play community training events, Darryl Dick, the former Moose Factory RTP community mentor, approached me, expressing interest in my research. Our exchanges led to an invitation to their Gathering of Our Peoples event in August 2013. I took this occasion to spend two weeks in the community with the intent to get to know the Ojibwe culture and people, and to help evaluate the

¹ Right To Play Canada is a sport for development non-governmental organization bringing life-skills training to Aboriginal Youth. For more information go to www.righttoplay.com. Although my experience at the time extended to over 20 First Nation communities involved with Right To Play Canada, the focus of my thesis will be with Moose Cree First Nation.

Right To Play youth programming while exploring the possibilities for my own research.

Despite feeling quite at home in the space as a Métis woman, and despite seemingly blending in, I was approached by Wapistan (a member of Moose Cree First Nation) and asked what I was doing there. Excited that someone asked, I immediately blurted out my research interests and desire to work more closely with the community on a research project. He listened. Then he placed his hand on my shoulder, and advised me to approach everything I do with eyes of innocence, a beginner's mind, and an open heart. With the utmost respect and consideration for my naivety, he said, "You know nothing about these people, their history, their present, and their way of life." I listened and felt relieved that my academic persona had been laid bare. He was asking me to be present without any hidden agenda, as a way to gain some insight rather than garner interest from the research. I nodded and murmured words of gratitude. He has since become a mentor and sounding board throughout this research study. Our conversations demanded that I become "absent of a need to be in control," with "a desire to be connected to and to be part of a moral community where a primary goal is the compassionate understanding of another's moral position" (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008, p. 11). A few days later, Wapistan invited me to a sweat lodge ceremony. I accepted the invitation and asked to receive guidance from within the lodge. During the third round of the ceremony, the lodge keeper said out loud, "Open your eyes." It was not only a message to literally open my eyes, but figuratively to see beyond my limited vision. A quiet and familiar whisper emerged from the lodge: "Ask the community to

help you in your research; you need their help more than they need yours.” Soon thereafter, I felt a tear roll down my cheek. My eyes were open. It was a sobering moment. There were no other instructions, at least not on that day.

It quickly became evident that I needed to abandon my recorder and fine-tuned interview questions, and incorporate the Métis and Cree method of gathering knowledge. Through my research experience, I became increasingly aware of the importance of critical self-reflexivity when doing health research within an Indigenous context. By this I mean, drawing on importance of critical self-reflectivity directed equally both within and outwardly (within to confront the self-deficit thinking – feeling inadequate due to many losses and lack of self-responsibility) and outwardly to deficit perspectives (by this I mean colonial systems/thinking that undermines Indigenous knowledge and people by thinking we need to be fixed or fit in Canadian society).

During these two weeks of working closely with Darryl, meeting the youth, Moose Cree band, teachers, community members, and educators, and discussing challenges and ways in which to strengthen a land-based focus at the Youth Centre, I took to heart Darryl’s request for advocacy to “help the people from the South understand that we do things differently here” (Darryl Dick, personal communication, August 2, 2014). For me, his words worked “like an arrow, piercing the injustices of our past, and slicing open more avenues for change” (Anderson, 2011, p. 161).

From this and other conversations—with the Band council, Youth Centre leaders, youth, and Elders—the direction of the arrow changed, as did the objective of this study. The commitment to Indigenous resurgence and reconnecting youth to the

land merit attention and deep consideration as we strive to rebuild strong families and communities. My first experience in Moose Factory sparked my concern with how Indigenous perspectives of health and wellbeing are absent from initiatives that seek to benefit Indigenous peoples, specifically youth. Absent not for a lack of want from Indigenous communities, but from a lack of privilege. My research addresses this concern by learning from the strengths and concerted actions being taken by Indigenous peoples in their efforts to foster the Indigenous concept of wellbeing. It is called *milo pimatisiwin*² in Cree, meaning the good life, and one way that it finds expression is through land-based initiatives for youth.

As a Métis woman growing up in a settler farming community, I learned that the Métis are a mixed-race, defeated, and disposable people. This view influenced the creation of an identity based on invisibility and impacted our ability to cultivate a Métis understanding of health and wellbeing (Adese, 2014; Hodgson-Smith & Kermoal, 2016). Further, the invisibility of Métis ways of understanding health and wellbeing moved through the generations (Adese, 2014; Gaudet, 2009, 2014). Many of us have forgotten the ways of *wahkotowin*—our connection and responsibility to our relations (Adese, 2014; Campbell, 2007).

In response to the invisibility of Indigenous perspectives of health and wellbeing, Indigenous research methodologies grounded in a connection to the land are being reclaimed, and are increasingly appearing within academia (Absolon, 2011; Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2009, 2015; Smith, 2000; Smith, 2012). “To remember is a way to re-know and

²The Dictionary of Moose Cree, 2015, defines “milo” as good, nice, or well, and “pimatisiwin” as life. The Cree dictionary further suggests to go to the word “ililiwiwin.”

re-claim a part of your life” (Cajete, 1995, p. 87). The process of reclaiming both through academia and through land-based initiatives is bringing to light the value of Indigenous knowledge, an aspect of which is a spirit of knowing rooted in a return to the teachings and knowledge from within an Indigenous worldview.

Margaret Kovach (2009), a Saulteaux and Nehiyaw scholar and educator, helps us understand a spirit of knowing when she writes, “Within an indigenous research framework, researchers would present their interpretation of the tribal epistemology guiding their research, and they would do so in her or his own way” (p. 64). The two aspects of the spirit of knowing referred to by Kovach (tribal epistemology and individual creativity) differ according to tribal knowledge systems. However, common to Indigenous knowledge systems is a sense that wellbeing connected to land is vital to fostering a strong cultural identity and a sense of belonging rooted in a historical, social, spiritual, and cultural context.

Wellbeing that comes from within connection to land led me to explore the importance of an Indigenous research methodology that helps to recognize and to come to know the concept of *milo pimatisiwin*. Coming to know is more than an intellectual pursuit, it is “the pursuit of whole body intelligence practiced in the context of freedom, when realized collectively it generates generations of loving, creative, innovative, self-determining, inter-dependent, and self-regulated community minded individuals” (Simpson, 2014, p. 7). *Milo pimatisiwin* comes from within this meaning and purpose. It is an Indigenous philosophy, a way of life that recognizes and respects a reciprocal connection to the whole of creation as part of being well and healthy. Maria Campbell

(2007), Métis Elder, reminds us of the reciprocal relationship embedded in the good life:

At one time, from our place it [*whakotowin*] meant the whole of creation. And our teachings taught us that all of creation is related and inter-connected to all things within it. *Wahkotowin* meant honouring and respecting those relationships. [It was] our stories, songs, ceremonies, and dances that taught us from birth to death our responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to each other. Human to human, human to plants, human to animals, to the water and especially to the earth. And in turn all of creation had responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to us (p. 5).

This understanding of health and wellbeing will be explored in this thesis.

Research purpose

My research purpose is to examine how an Indigenous research methodology helps us to know land-based initiatives as an expression of *milo pimatisiwin*. In my efforts to acknowledge Indigenous conceptions of health and wellbeing, and the issue of the imbalance of power in health research, I ask: To what extent can Indigenous research methodologies lead to a greater recognition of what lies at the heart of wellbeing for Indigenous peoples? While struggling to understand more fully my own connection to the land, I was invited to Moose Factory, home of the Moose Cree First Nation people, also known as Omushkego and the *illiliw*, meaning a human and a Cree person in the Moose Cree dialect. It was during my visits to Moose Factory that I began to grasp what the literature on Indigenous research methodologies was about, and what the Omushkego people themselves were pointing to in reference to the importance of their land-based initiatives for youth. The key aim of this study is to examine Indigenous research methodologies, Omushkegowuk perspectives on the correlation of connection to the land and wellbeing, and land-based initiatives for

Omushkegowuk youth in Moose Factory, Ontario. In the next section, I provide context for this initial stage of my research project with Moose Cree First Nation. And in the section following that, I provide an overview of the chapters of this thesis.

Research Project Context

Donna Mertens (2009) writes: "Researchers and evaluators are using a deficit perspective when they choose to focus only on the problems in a community and ignore the strengths" (p. 17). In the context of Indigenous health, I understand this statement to mean that research about or for Indigenous people is often shaped by the concerns and norms of Western notions of health and wellbeing. Fostering an Indigenous understanding of wellbeing is not valued as a legitimate form of health research (Chilisa, 2011; Smith, 2012).

In my preliminary meetings with the Moose Cree First Nation Band to discuss my research project, a concern that related to youth wellbeing was expressed repeatedly. I encountered three aspects of this concern that clearly overlap with one another. First, there is a lack of understanding of what it means to be *illiliw* (a Cree person/a human being)³ – beyond the state determined category of Aboriginal. Second, the connection to the land has been ruptured, creating a gap of knowledge transfer between generations. And third, Cree child-rearing practices and teachings have been lost due to the Indian Residential School system. When I asked Elder William Louttit what meaningful research would be, he responded by saying: "As we raise little

³ For further information on the translation of Cree meanings, see the Dictionary of Moose Cree, 2015, published by Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute & Moose Cree First Nation.

children, we are doing it without grannies' beautiful lullabies; instead we are using plastic rattles."

The method of being well as suggested by William links to Cree/Métis writer Kim Anderson's research on the role of life stage teachings and knowledge in fostering community health and wellbeing. It is well known teachings to Indigenous peoples that are essential to fostering *milo pimatisiwin*. Anderson (2011) also points out that "knowing our history is an integral part of recovery for us as indigenous peoples and for our communities in general" (p. 4). Knowledge of our history is commonly positioned in Indigenous health research as a vital part of the process of fostering the good life.

Milo pimatisiwin has been threatened by intergenerational stressors, including the residential school legacy, displacement from land, equity issues, poverty, loss of language, cultural knowledge, addiction and loss of kinship systems. The heart of *milo pimatisiwin* was relegated to the margins and replaced with "a life of poverty and welfare as the uneducated, and unemployed or unemployable" (Hart, 2010, p. 4). These concerns are not unfamiliar to Indigenous peoples across Canada and the globe (WHO, 2015).

The Omushkego people are addressing these concerns for their own purposes and with their own respective methods. In their quest to restore *milo pimatisiwin*, the community developed various wellbeing initiatives for youth. Based on the direction provided by the community, I have focused my research on these initiatives. For example, Project George, a program focused on reconnecting youth to the land, has been operating since 2009. A second initiative led and designed by the community, Milo

Pimatisiwin: Healthy Living for Omushkego Youth, emerged out of this study. I sought to use Indigenous methodologies to come to know if these land-based initiatives regenerate a connection to the land for the sake of youth and community wellbeing, and how they are embedded in *milo pimatisiwin*. This research builds mainly on the work of Indigenous scholars and communities who focus on healing and rebuilding Indigenous communities.

The emphasis on the land was a consistent theme that emerged in listening to those involved in the Right To Play programming initiatives for Moose Cree youth. As a land-based society, Moose Cree First Nation is deeply reliant on the land for survival. What I found most interesting was how the idea of the land seemed to have very little correlation with dogmatic ideologies. I was further intrigued by how many people, including the youth, expressed the need to learn the ways of the land, to be on the land, and to make this connection relevant within recreational programming. Many explained how this way of life is central to the community's wellbeing, but seemingly remains distant for some. Yet it seemed that the land was at the heart of the people, and furthermore, at the heart of an idea expressed as *milo pimatisiwin*. The community critiqued the initial focus of my research with Right to Play Canada given the program limitations to integrate Omushkegowuk values and land-based initiatives. This critique helped me shift the focus of my research from a Western-based recreation program that potentially "replaces" Indigenous knowledge to community-inspired land-based initiatives (Arellano, 2015; Kope, 2014). This turn led to more meaningful research and encouraged my participation in obtaining funding to support the existing program

(Project George) and to support a new community initiative (Milo Pimatisiwin: Healthy Living for Omushekogo Youth), which will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Overview of Chapters

My thesis is divided into six chapters. In Chapter One, I begin with a socio-cultural and historical examination of Moose Cree First Nation and its region. I review and discuss key research and concepts that pertain to the areas of study relevant to my research: contemporary colonialism, settler-colonial relations, decolonization, an Indigenous perspective on health (*milo pimatisiwin*), and land-based initiatives as decolonizing strategies.

In Chapter Two, I look at how my first visit to Moose Factory led me to reflect and think more critically about Indigenous research methodologies in order to respond to the community's research interest. I provide some context for understanding the ways in which power relations are re-inscribed or challenged within an Indigenous research context. For the purposes of contextualizing my research aim, I introduce community-based and participatory research from an Indigenous perspective as the most appropriate approach to research with an Indigenous community. I also examine a broad range of literature that can assist Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to critically discern the positioning of the participatory mode in their respective research. I suggest questioning the activity we are asking communities to participate in, as a way toward decolonizing the research process. This chapter also includes literature that considers participatory research from an Indigenous perspective, framed by Indigenous Research Methodology, as will be explained further. The chapter exposes

the voice of my lived experiences in an uncomfortable attempt to “do” research from a place outside of myself. It concludes by sharing how some Omushkego people I met during this first visit supported me in rethinking participatory research taking into account an Indigenous epistemology of connection to land.

Chapter Three presents the process of coming to an Indigenous research methodology. The methodological inquiry that guided my research is also included in this chapter. More specifically, I assess the characteristics of Indigenous research methodologies by going to the literature, experiences of Indigenous researchers and participating as myself in Moose Cree life. The chapter goes on to describe my experiences as an Indigenous researcher and how I have come to understand the decolonizing process of research grounded in Métis and Cree epistemology. In this chapter, I will also explain how my pursuit of an Indigenous research methodology required me to seek guidance from Elders and to return home to Saskatchewan.

In Chapter Four, I first present some of the Omushkego people’s conception of the land, and demonstrate the ways in which their land-based initiatives respond to colonial conditions, and regenerate a continuity of cultural methods of wellbeing. Continuity provides a context for the complex social, political and cultural meaning of Indigenous people’s connection to the land. The chapter invites the reader to consider an understanding of youth wellbeing grounded in Indigenous thought. It explores a specific land-based initiative for youth called “Project George” in the Moose Cree First Nation community in Northern Ontario. The chapter also examines the historical role of *Omushkego* women and their valuable contribution to the Project George initiative. It

concludes with a reflection on the broader impact of reconnecting to the land as lived and expressed by the community itself.

Chapter Five takes a creative turn. By this I mean that the chapter is co-authored with the Director of the John Delaney Youth Centre in Moose Factory. It presents a community-led land-based initiative called Milo Pimatisiwin: Healthy Living for Omushkego Youth, an initiative that centres youth and community wellbeing efforts within the social and cultural context of the Youth Centre itself. With the support of funding from Students for Canada's North at the University of Ottawa and the support of Moose Cree First Nation Council, we were able to implement this project during the course of the research study. In harmony with an Indigenous Research methodology, the project seeks to preserve and cultivate an Indigenous worldview with the intent to foster the strength that exists within the community. This chapter elaborates on how the concept of *milo pimatisiwin* is expressed in land-based initiatives for *Omushkego* youth. We reintroduce the Moose Cree meaning of *milo pimatisiwin*—"good and healthy living"—based on our conversation, in addition to a broader literature review on the Indigenous understanding of the good life. This sets the background for the chapter's main focus, namely the significance of sharing *pimatisiwin* teachings over the local youth radio station and through youth programming. This article highlights the Director's vision, leadership efforts, and challenges in fostering *milo pimatisiwin* as expressed through land-based initiatives at the Youth Centre. It also brings forth the experiences and wisdom of the youth involved in the Milo Pimatisiwin project, as well as lessons learned.

I conclude this study in Chapter Six with a return to my research purpose, which was to examine how an Indigenous research methodology can help us to recognize land-based initiatives as *milo pimatisiwin*. Guided by an Indigenous research methodology – the Visiting Way, we come to understand these land-based initiatives as diverse, complex, and interrelated with the concept of *milo pimatisiwin*. As important, they represent ongoing interventions to settler-colonial relations by recreating conditions for youth to come to know their connection to the land. In this Chapter, which I call “Practicing Strength from Within,” I give an overview of the research contributions and then share what I have learned from the Omushkego people, and the reflections and teachings that helped to strengthen my coming to know an Indigenous research methodology. To me, these teachings offer a perspective that can help guide future researchers to decolonize themselves in their research process. These teachings, I suggest, assist with understanding researcher responsibility in Indigenous health research in ways that are attentive to *milo pimatisiwin* and to each person’s experiences as part of the whole.

Chapter One: Moose Cree First Nation and the Legacy of Colonialism

The Moose Cree First Nation community also known as Omushkego are diverse cultures of Cree people who live along the shores of western James Bay and south-west Hudson Bay. For millennia, the Omushkego lifestyle was intimately tied to the land and to family. The people lived a semi-nomadic existence, making use of the abundant land, water, food, and material resources. Seasonal movement was influenced by the land, the climate, and food sources. People lived in small family groups according to traditional ways and values, which they depended upon for their survival. In the summer, they would travel by water to harvest fish, berries, and other food staples (Flannery, 1995). Omushkego Elder Louis Bird explains:

Living together in such small kin-based groups, we respected one another, helped one another, trusted one another. This was our law. It was an ideal way to raise a child, who learned in an intimate, personal multi-generational extended family. It was experiential learning. It was learning through observation and story-telling. Sometimes there were challenges, but most of the time we experienced *milo-pimaatisiwin* or *mino-pimaatisiwin* (a good or satisfying life) (www.ourvoices.ca).

Summer was a time to come together in larger groups for material exchanges, for socializing, and for sharing cultural practices. Food was generally at the centre of these gatherings. In the winter, the people would make their way to their trap lines. The spring and fall were considered the ideal seasons for hunting waterfowl and big game, such as moose. This cycle of hunting and harvesting continues today for some of the families of Moose Factory. However, this way of life has declined significantly due to various factors: “loss of control over traditional territories, ecosystem degradation and changes in access to and availability of foods as a result of human activities; climate change, change in lifestyle, loss of traditional knowledge, and economic constraints that

limit ability to participate in harvesting” (First Nations Food, Nutrition & Environment Study, 2014, p. 10).

James Bay was strategically positioned for trading and for acquiring rich, land-based resources. Europeans entered the people’s territory to harvest resources. The Hudson’s Bay Company set up posts along the river—one of them as early as 1673, in what is now Moose Factory. In 1905, the Moose Cree signed Treaty 9 with the Crown, allocating for the First Nation two tracts of reserve land (Moose Factory and French River) for its own use. Treaty 9 had compounding effects on once-viable cultural practices, long exercised by the community in harmony with their natural, spiritual, and social surroundings. Traditional hunting practices, Cree governance, and values began to change.

The land-based way of sharing food, and of visiting and taking care of one another, eroded, as did ways of learning from the land and with the land (Flannery, 1995; Long, 2010). “School attendance began to be enforced in the 1930s, following the completion of the railway to Moosonee. Indians in James Bay were pressured by government officials and church to send their children to residential school” (Flannery, 1995, p. 17). Learning and ways of being in relationship that came from an intimate connection to the land, family, and ceremonies diminished. The church and state’s self-proclaimed role to oversee the Cree people contradicted Cree ways of being that respected one’s individual freedom (Preston, 2002). The clash of Cree beliefs and Christianity became another dividing force in the community.

In 1920, Moose Factory became one of the major permanent settlements in the James Bay area. Today, many Moose Cree people and a few Métis families live in Moose Factory. Moose Factory island is 1,300 acres—approximately five miles long and two miles wide. The island currently houses approximately 2,500 people, 974 of whom are under the age of 17. The island is governed by three jurisdictions. Moose Cree First Nation peoples govern with an elected Chief, Deputy Chief, and Band Councillors. The other two jurisdictions are under the control of the province of Ontario and the federal government. Access to the island varies according to the season: by boat taxi in the summer, by vehicle on the ice road in the winter, and by helicopter taxi during the spring break up and fall freeze up of the Moose River.

In the last century, the Horden Hall residential school, and later the federally-run tuberculosis hospital (which served portions of Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec), were contributing factors to the growth of cultural diversity in Moose Factory. Today, in addition to English, three dialects of Cree are spoken in Moose Factory: Moose Cree, Swampy Cree, and Eastern Cree.

The main employers of the community are the Weeneebayko General Hospital, which provides medical services to other far to reach First Nation communities along James Bay, Moose Cree First Nation Band. The main infrastructure on the island can be found in the community complex, which has a pharmacy, postal outlet, café, restaurant, daycare, Band Offices, Moose Cree health and wellbeing services, and the Northern Store. Next to the complex is the Thomas Cheechoo Jr. Memorial Complex, which has a community hall and an indoor hockey arena that serves various purposes including sporting events, family gatherings, and cultural and musical events. Across the road

from the complex and the arena stands a new building, the Emergency Preparedness and Response Centre (EPR Centre). The major tenants of the EPR Centre are the Nishnawbe Aski Police Service, the James Bay Ambulance Service, the Moose Factory Island Fire & Rescue, and Band Council offices. The Centre also has a training facility and is often used for community events.

The island also has an Elders' residence that overlooks the bay. The community is in the process of building its own home care facility on the island. There are three schools on the island for students from kindergarten through high school. The Delores D. Echum Composite School is connected to the John Delaney Youth Centre. Along with the complex, there is a locally-run grocery and general store called G.G.'s, and during the summer months, you will find independent fast-food booths operating out of people's homes. QuickStop, a main store on the island, sells gasoline and convenience store products, and has a fast-food counter with Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut.

The members of MoCreebec—a Cree Nation originating from the East coast of Quebec—also share the island of Moose Factory. Although their families have been living in the James Bay region for many years, it was in 1983 that they established a formal Band Council and constitutional framework. MoCreebec operates independently from Moose Cree First Nation, given that their members were not signatories to Treaty 9. Among other contributions, MoCreebec owns and operates the only hotel on the island, EcoLodge. Increasingly, the members of Moose Cree First Nation and MoCreebec are seeking creative ways to foster *milo pimatisiwin* for their families (www.mocreebec.com). For example, monthly community Town Hall meetings in collaboration with Moose Cree First Nation and MoCreebec Council were set to address

challenges they face as a community, such as drugs and alcohol abuse, violence in many forms, historical trauma, lack of services, youth education, working together, healing and healthy life and inter-agency communication.

Members of both Moose Cree First Nation and MoCreebec also reside in the small town of Moosonee, located on the Moose River. Moosonee was originally settled by a French-based religious congregation in 1903. They established a fur trading post to compete with the Hudson Bay Company. The development of the railway in the early 1930s placed Moosonee as a central transportation hub for James Bay coastal communities (www.moosonee.ca).

In Moose Factory, indoor/outdoor Cree Interpretative Centre is open during the summer months for tourists and the community. The Centre has informational exhibits on the history of Moose Factory, and work by local artisans. The artistic production of beadwork, tanned moose hides, and tamarak-made geese continues to be practiced. Examples of traditional dwellings such as the shaptuwan, askigan, and wigwam are found in the outdoor area of the Centre. The outdoor structure called the shaptuwan, a long teepee with doors at each end, is often used for community and teaching events. Down the street from the Cree Interpretative Centre, you will find the Moose Cree Educational Authority offices. They are governed by a Board of Directors under the direction of Moose Cree First Nation. Families live in typical modern homes, with traditional dwellings such as the askigan in their back yards for family gatherings, traditional food preparation, and visiting. Housing consists of rentals and privately owned houses, depending on the jurisdiction (either on Crown land, municipality or

reserve land) in which homes are situated. Utilities such as water and sewers are serviced on the island by Weeneebayko Health Ahtuskaywin and Moose Cree First Nation. Electrical services are provided by Hydro Ontario. Cell phone service has recently been made accessible to the island. The island has its own local radio station, Island 101.7 FM, that is housed in the John Delaney Youth Centre. The local radio station and the annual Cree music festivals along the James showcase the work of local singers and songwriters, Juno award-winners, and film producers.

Community members estimate that approximately half of the community participates in the spring and fall goose hunts to sustain their families with wild meats for the year. A recent study of 83 families in Moose Factory by the First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study (2014) revealed that on average, 19 grams of traditional food is consumed per person, per day. The most popular traditional foods are moose, geese, and walleye. As mentioned in the study, “more than three-quarters of the families reported that they would like to have more traditional foods. However, multiple barriers to increased use were reported, including the lack of time, no hunter in the household and lack of equipment or transportation” (2014, p. 2). The study concluded that many families were food insecure, and that one-third of the research participants reported having diabetes. I heard from many members of the community, and a Cree diabetes health practitioner, that when people go to the bush to pursue land-based activities such as hunting, visiting, trapping and fishing, they experience positive changes in their overall physical and spiritual wellbeing.

An Ongoing Community-centred Perspective

In a conversation with Karen Pine-Cheechoo, an Anishnabe woman originally from Garden River who had married into the Cree culture 36 years earlier, I gained some historical understanding of the social context. Her experiences, insights, and wisdom offer an overview beyond anything found in the anthropological, historical, or ethnographical literature. She has a deep knowledge of the Cree way of life that allows her to provide a remarkable account of the Cree people's adaptation to colonialism while maintaining their connection to the land. In order to gain a better understanding of the community's concerns for wellbeing from a socio-cultural perspective, I will present Karen's observations on the community's history, and the movement for cultural regeneration. She explained that in the 1970s, the community faced a high rate of suicides for the first time. This was a crisis for which the people were not prepared. New funding came into the community to address this crisis, but outsiders, such as psychiatrists, led the response, with little or no intervention from the people themselves, except as liaisons. Karen lamented this "healthy Canada" approach. The community's more recent calamity of youth suicides has also increased the presence of outside help, including organizations such as Right To Play (Arellano, 2015).

With the rise of the Indian movement in the 1970s across Canada and the United States, many young Cree people left their communities. Education involved going south, leaving family and cultural ways of life behind. Karen explained that getting educated meant moving ahead alone, without your community. Education came at a cost, and resulted in a collision of cultures. For these reasons, Western education was not always

valued by the community, and rightly so. Educating people in their own history, stories, language, and way of life was lost among the generations who were either taken away to residential schools or otherwise relocated for post-secondary education purposes. Learning from a Cree perspective involves the community, from the young to the old. This way of coming to know through relations is perceived by the community as a major factor in the importance of their land-based initiatives and cultural continuity.

A People's Movement: "Waking Up Our Elders"

Karen explained how the well-known "Indian" movement in the 1970s led to an awakening of Cree Elders, also referred to by the Cree as the "old people." The old people began to sober up—to heal—from the effects of the Indian residential school experience. They started to remember who they were and who they were not, and to reawaken to the Cree way of life and the knowledge that lived inside of them. Stories that had never been passed on were slowly being shared. This brought a new understanding of what happened to the wellbeing of families, the community, and individuals. It also created a space for beliefs and ceremonies that had been kept secret, in anticipation of a time when it would be safe for them to return again. The old songs and the sound of the drum began to come back to the community. The spirit and heartbeat of the land, and of the people, were helping people to heal.

At that time of Indigenous resurgence, in the 1970s, Elders from the other side of the bay (Albany and Attiwapiskat), as well as well-known Elder Fred Ahekawit (from Beardy's reserve in Saskatchewan), were invited to share knowledge, songs, and teachings. Elders also known as Cree knowledge keepers helped in the regeneration of

the community spirit through learning from, and with, the land. Karen's recollections provide a hopeful context for the continuation of James Bay Cree cultural regeneration.

Values of a reciprocal-based economy were being applied. People gave each other gun shells in exchange for geese. In turn, the hunters would harvest geese both for the gathering and for their own families. Exchange and barter were done in a currency of the community's own making. People were also learning how to prepare traditional foods. The work was being done with humour and fun, and the whole community was involved.

The gatherings were called Indian Days, and were part of a well-known Indigenous resurgence across North America that involved people going back to the land and learning the stories and ways of the land. These gatherings were part of a yearly cycle of preparing and fundraising. Growing awareness led to an increase of people learning from Elders, some of whom came from other communities. The spiritual gifts of the Elders were shared with the community. Ceremonies, songs, dances, and sacred instruments—such as pipes—were, and still are today, returning to the community. Karen explained:

People have done well, and as a community have done well. We have our ceremonies here now, and lodge keepers and pipe keepers. We even have our own lodges—those Aski cans, the teepees with the two peaks, two fire pits. Shoptawan. Those are their own lodges. In families, majority have their own smoke houses, so they have their own family celebrations and get-togethers, and they all cook their own traditional food. They are very family-centred and very community-connected. Everyone has lodges here. You will see them a lot in the backyards, and you'll see some public ones. There is more space for that as well, and it's still going that way (Karen Pine Cheechoo, personal communication, January 13, 2014).

This cultural regeneration came with its own challenges and conflicts, given that the Christian ideology was well established in the community. Community members are addressing these differences in their own ways, drawing strength from their relationships and from their sense of responsibility toward each other.

Karen's knowledge, experience, and understanding of an Indigenous perspective of health and wellbeing shed light on the practices that foster *milo pimatisiwin*. She provides a Cree perspective on learning by doing, learning through conversations, and learning through visiting, ways of learning from and on the land that are being reclaimed. The O mushkegowuk people continue to draw strength from their evolving culture—going back to the land, to ceremonies, to language, to songs, and to the teachings of their ancestors. Land-based initiatives strive to reawaken this knowledge from within, and to carry it forward.

Members of the Moose Cree First Nation Band Council explained to me how they are assuming authority over health, education, addiction programs, land-based planning, environmental program planning and community infrastructure. They are negotiating and renegotiating funding agreements with outside organizations such as Ontario Power Generator, Detour Gold, DeBeers Mines, and the Lower Mattagami River project. They have a long-term vision of wellbeing that is rooted in their values, their language, their way of thinking, and more precisely, on their own terms. The Moose Cree education directorate is attempting to re-establish, within the school curriculum and within post-secondary studies, land-based initiatives to ground learning about and on the land. Adequate funding to implement this initiative remains a challenge. The

Youth Services Department is also re-focusing its vision to include Omushkegowuk knowledge and teachings at its centre (Gaudet & Chilton, forthcoming).

The people themselves are the first to admit that there is a long road ahead for recovering Cree consciousness from centuries of colonial systems, laws, attitudes, and policies. But despite the clear challenges that Indigenous peoples face, they continue to move forward and to apply their cultural methodologies, knowledge, theories, and practices as means to reconnect with the ways their ancestors cared for one another, their families, their bodies, and the land, and to assert their decision-making authority over their territorial land.

Colonialism, Post-Colonialism & Decolonization

Colonialism is defined as a “process through which one group takes control of another group’s lands, resources and governance authority and maintains that group in a state of subordination based on beliefs of racial and cultural inferiority of the subordinated group” (Grammond 2013). It is a concept most commonly used to associate the act of domination to civilize the world by cleansing it from the “uncivilized” with an aim to establish a functioning equitable society of “good” and “civilized” citizens (Coulthard, 2014; Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Spivak, 1998). Alfred and Corntassel’s (2005) article “Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism” quotes the well-known anti-colonial thinker Frantz Fanon’s description of the process of colonialism:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and

destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today (p. 602).

An understanding of the process of colonialism as forcing one group under the control of another provides context for Indigenous peoples' loss of control over, ownership of, and connection to their knowledge systems. The process of re-valuing what has been devalued and positioning the struggle against the categorization and identification of the "uncivilized" has emerged as the aim of post-colonialism. This categorization and identification, also described as "overt racism," is based on the unequal power dynamic that exists between the dominating culture, the "superior," and the colonized, the "inferior" (Spivak, 1998). This universalization of superiority legitimizes the upholding of characteristics of successful participation in modern social life, and constructs the marginalization of the "uncivilized" other (Spivak, 1998). Given this situation, post-colonial theory "intervenes in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic normality to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples" (Bhadha, 1994, p. 171). The intervention of post-colonialism aims at the renewal of knowledge production that comes from marginalized groups (Bhadha, 1994; Spivak, 1998).

The literature on post-colonial theory and critical theory has helped us to understand the pervasive and diverse mechanisms of colonialism around the world. "The word post-colonial is used in the research context to denote the continuous struggle of non-Western societies that suffered European colonization, indigenous peoples, and historically marginalized groups to resist suppression of their ways of knowing, and the globalization of knowledge, legitimizing Western knowledge as the

only legitimate knowledge” (Chilisa, 2011, p. 12). Indigenous scholars have drawn on anti-colonial theorists such as Fanon, Bhadha, and Spivak to develop a view of settler-colonialism in Canada.

Settler-Colonialism

Within the Canadian context, settler-colonialism is a term being used to better understand contemporary colonialism (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005) and the persistent sociocultural disadvantages faced by Indigenous peoples (Wolfe, 2006). Alfred and Corntassel (2005) define contemporary colonialism as “a form of post-modern imperialism in which domination is still the Settler imperative but where colonizers have designed and practice more subtle means (in contrast to the earlier forms of missionary and militaristic colonial enterprises) of accomplishing their objectives” (pp. 597–598). The concept of settler-colonialism describes a form of contemporary colonialism that positions the ongoing efforts of colonialism by maintaining settler society as the dominant group and authority over land, resources, and governance. We learn that in the context of the relationship between Canada as a settler-state and Indigenous peoples, the mechanisms of domination vary. Some of these mechanisms are brutal and direct, such as Christianization, the Indian Act, Indian Residential Schools, Reservation systems, the 1885 Northwest Metis Resistance, and dispossession of land, while others are more insidious, such as economic dependency on the state.

In Alfred and Corntassel’s words, “we live in an era of postmodern imperialism and manipulations by shape-shifting colonial powers; the instruments of domination are evolving and inventing new methods to erase Indigenous histories and senses of place” (2005, p. 601). Coulthard (2014) analyses this shape-shifting and subtle control

when he deconstructs Canadian politics of recognition, emphasizing the production of “psycho-affective attachments,” such as the 2008 state apology for residential schools or the recognition of certain Indigenous rights, which are internalized as expressions of Indigenous self-empowerment but which ultimately “naturalize” settler-colonial hierarchies and colonial structures. The Indigenous class, as imposed by the settler-colonizer, is therefore seen as ingrained in the colonial legal apparatus, where predatory capitalism and other forms of oppression play a central role in dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their land and self-determination (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005).

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2013), a Nishnaabeg writer, calls this logic “extraction-assimilation systems” of thinking as it refers to land, settlers, state, and Indigenous peoples. “In this kind of thinking, every part of our culture that is seemingly useful to the extractivist mindset gets extracted” (Simpson, in Klein & Simpson, 2013).

Understanding these settler-colonial relations provides a context for cultural and political resurgence as central to decolonization. Glenn Coulthard (2014), Dene scholar, explains:

A settler-colonial relationship is one characterized by a particular form of domination; that is, it is a relationship where power—in this case, interrelated discursive and non-discursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power—has been structured into a relatively secure or regimental set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority (p. 7).

Patrick Wolfe (2006), anthropologist and scholar of settler-colonialism, also argues that the motive of settler-colonial domination is accessibility to land, to territory. “Settler colonialism is foundational to modernity,” and ultimately, “it destroys to replace” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 394, 388).

Given that the premise of colonialism is the act of exploiting and dominating land, resources, and the “other” through, for example, assimilation, displacement, individualism, degradation of women, and control of food sources, then settler-colonialism is contingent on categorizing the other as the “uncivilized.” This categorization maintains a settler-colonial consciousness that absolves itself of a collective responsibility, yet defines the terms of engagement based on the logic of elimination (Regan, 2010; Wolfe, 2006). These terms categorize and normalize in order to defend settler needs. Such a consciousness encourages the “others” to think that they are incapable of doing anything for themselves but facilitate their own demise. Corn tassel (2012), a Cherokee scholar, attests that

one of our biggest enemies is compartmentalization, as shape-shifting colonial entities attempt to sever our relationship to the natural world and define the terrain of struggle. Policy-makers who frame new government initiatives as “economic development” miss the larger connections embedded within Indigenous economies linking homelands, culture and communities (in Smith, 2013).

With this understanding of how the other is constructed, it becomes evident why Indigenous scholars and their communities draw strength from land-based initiatives, land-based pedagogy, and the cultural teachings of *milo pimatisiwin* in order to stand up for their territories, kinship systems, and community and youth wellbeing (Simpson, 2011, 2014; Simpson & Coulthard, 2014). Fostering *milo pimatisiwin* through land-based initiatives liberates, if only briefly, from the resistance of settler-colonialism. Through this study, I have become aware of how “shape-shifting colonial entities” repeat the entrenched patterns when the settler consciousness confronts its own emptiness. It then reaches to the other, or takes from the other, to temporarily fill the

void. Again settler-colonialism is re-centred to alter the positions of power, making it appear that the “uncivilized” other is valued, needed, and viable within the economy. Cultural grounding in the “terrain and geography of Indigenous history” (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005) is a means to connect with and relearn ancestral wisdom, traditional teachings, the language, ways of providing natural foods and medicines, kinship responsibilities, work ethics, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. These are broadly what Indigenous scholars refer to as the pillars of Indigenous resurgence and community wellbeing (Anderson, 2011; Simpson, 2014; Corntassel, 2012; Coulthard, 2014).

Settler-colonialism and its impact on cultural continuity

The transmission of knowledge between generations has eroded significantly over the past few centuries for many land-based societies around the world. The core essence, core teachings, and way of life of these societies have been cemented over to meet the standards of Western civilization’s superiority, existence, and progress. This has resulted in a great imbalance for people who were socially, economically, and spiritually living in relation with the land, inclusive of the cosmology of the land, whom I refer to mainly as Indigenous peoples throughout this paper (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). The harmful effects of colonialism have resulted in generations of poverty, addiction, suicide, marginalization, discrimination, disease, and violence for the Indigenous peoples of Canada (Kirmayer et al., 2007).

Cultural regeneration and health and wellbeing initiatives focused on Indigenous youth—the fastest growing population in Canadian society—have become

more important than ever. The motivation to develop land-based initiatives for Indigenous youth has grown due to the impact of the intergenerational transmission of historical trauma (Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, & Coulthard, 2014). Historical trauma, experienced by collective peoples over centuries and across generations, has been described by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation as trauma that moves through generations when unresolved or unhealed (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). There has been an extensive amount of research demonstrating how colonialism and social control by the domination of Eurocentric thinking drive and re-inform historical trauma (Brokenleg, 2012). To help understand the complexities of on-going colonialism, Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski (2004) describe three waves of colonization: cultural transition, cultural dispossession, and cultural oppression. Each category is addressed in reference to the land.

As a result of the insidious mechanisms of colonization, Indigenous youth across Canada face unique challenges in their paths forward. Indigenous youth often carry the intergenerational burdens that have historically compromised and shattered the enduring legacy of Indigenous knowledge, cultural identity, and traditional values (Anderson, 2000; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004; Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009). Yet, with the rise of the Indigenous healing ways since the 1960s, there has been a growing respect for the contribution of Indigenous knowledge and for the keepers of this knowledge. New literature on healing and restoring balance in response to the compounding effects of colonization has focused on “putting things back together” (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2004, p. 87). Increasingly, scholars are critically addressing the

Indigenous struggle for justice, healing, and the rightful assertion of *milo pimatisiwin* in contemporary society, and by doing so, are recreating their own theoretical and methodological way forward.

Anderson (2011) explains that for land-based societies, the idea of health and wellbeing is intricately woven into kinship relations, the land, and “fulfilling one’s life stage roles and responsibilities” (p. 2). Colonial mechanisms have “aimed at breaking down the powerful kinship systems that sustained communities, economically, politically and socially and spiritually, which had made them both resistant and resilient to colonial processes” (p. 29). Battiste and Henderson (2000) and Anderson (2000, 2011) describe how kin-based systems found in land-based societies established order and moral codes that fostered a way of living well. Anderson (2011) shares with us that the kinship system “consistently reinforced the relationship, roles, and responsibilities they carried towards each other” (p. 8). This way of thinking about kinship and land helps us to re-examine and challenge deficit thinking that tends to isolate youth wellbeing into categories of behaviour and individual-centred processes. On the contrary, it is known that the interaction between generations—elders and youth—and the land and language have been vital to the survival of Indigenous societies and to the good life (Anderson, 2011; Battiste 2013; Dorion, 2010; Simpson 2011). Recognizing the current challenges that Indigenous youth face, it is important to directly engage in decolonizing research strategies that correlate to Indigenous resurgence as an attempt to regenerate coming to know in a way that is concerned with

an Indigenous perspective of health and wellbeing and its influence on contemporary society.

Decolonization

Decolonization, a broad theoretical concept often referred to as a process of changing power relations, has manifested itself in various ways around the world (Wolfe, 2006). Within an Indigenous context, decolonization operates at many levels. It is considered as a process of “re-visioning resurgence” within the context of contemporary colonialism (Corntassel, 2012). Given that colonialism has disrupted the myriad of relationships to homeland, to family, to culture, to spirituality, and to communities, decolonization aims to reconnect relationships, heal kinship relations, foster life-affirming principles (*milo pimatisiwin*), restore balance, and confront settler-colonialism that renders invisible Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems (Corntassel, 2012; Simpson, 2014; Smith, 2012). According to Corntassel (2012),

Being Indigenous today means struggling to reclaim and regenerate one’s relational, place-based existence by challenging the ongoing, destructive forces of colonization. Whether through ceremony or through other ways that Indigenous peoples (re)connect to the natural world, processes of resurgence are often contentious and reflect the spiritual, cultural, economic, social and political scope of the struggle (p. 88).

The process of reclaiming and regenerating is a collective community effort that is not limited to merely recognizing the colonial agenda nor to individual inquiry. “Both decolonization and resurgence facilitate a renewal of roles and responsibilities as Indigenous peoples to the sustainable praxis of Indigenous livelihoods, food security, community governance, and relationship to the natural world and ceremonial life that enables the transmission of these cultural practices to future generations” (Corntassel,

2012, p. 98). Much of Indigenous research points to the simultaneous nature of inward and outward processes. Willie Ermine (1999), Cree thinker in Aboriginal epistemology, refers to “inward space where the real power lies” (p. 108) as the inward movement matures the perception that we are responsible for all our experiences. An epistemic inquiry from within, guides the interaction and exploration in relation to the external world, who we are and what the world is. The movement of inner and outer spaces and process are interrelated, which points to the Indigenous worldview of relationality which I will describe further in Chapter Three, on Indigenous research methodology.

Increasingly, Indigenous research is being strategically positioned to re-centre or regenerate Indigenous ways of doing, being, thinking, and knowing through scholars’ research aims and methodological inquiries (Anderson, 2011; Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). This has been referred to as a decolonizing approach to research. It is another way in which to confront deficit-based research. According to Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), the self-determination of Indigenous peoples is the decolonizing goal. For Smith (2012), “self-determination becomes more than a political goal. It becomes a goal of social justice that is expressed through and across a wide range of psychological, social, cultural and economic terrains. It necessarily involves the process of transformation, of decolonization, of healing and of mobilization of peoples” (p. 120). This decolonizing approach to research inevitably demands decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 2012). Smith (2012) cautions that decolonizing methodologies are not to be precariously applied to research with Indigenous peoples. Given the broad scope of Indigenous resurgence, the idea of

decolonizing research has raised concerns about the application of Western theories, methodologies, and epistemologies “to deliver any benefits to indigenous peoples whom science has long regarded, indeed has classified, as being not human” (Smith, 2012, p. 122). These concerns have signaled a strong need to develop a better understanding of *milo pimatisiwin* within both the academy and Indigenous societies themselves (Absolon, 2011).

Milo Pimatisiwin

Kovach (2005, 2009) explains how Indigenous language influences knowledge, signifies a way of thinking about and understanding the world, and guides one’s actions. For this reason, language in my research design is important because it influences the construction and production of knowledge. Although I do not speak the Cree language, I am conscious that—and like Kovach, intrigued to learn how—the language is connected to a worldview. Kovach’s (2009) research brought her to the understanding that “when Cree and Saulteaux Elders talk about the world as being alive, as of spirit, it makes sense because this is reinforced on a daily basis in the language” (p. 66). The more I listen to the Elders, to the whispers of nature, and to echoes of a deeper inner knowing, the more I respect the legacy of our ancestors. One could conclude that this too is a process of decolonization, as I notice the emptiness of words—words without the primordial life force—and especially words that have been used to construct a consciousness that is built on denigration, ignorance, and fragmentation. Indigenous language, as a Mohawk Elder Jan Longboat explained at a teaching circle at Wabano Aboriginal Health Conference in 2012, carries meaning,

purpose, way of relating, conducting one's life and collective consciousness. It carries layers of understanding and even ancestral memory. "The ideology of language provokes methodological and theoretical shifts that require research to flow from tribal epistemologies" (Kovach, 2009, p. 39). Concepts such as *milo pimatisiwin* can begin to open pathways of consciousness that allow us to perceive new thinking of what it means to live and be well.

Milo pimatisiwin is respected as a lifelong, continuous learning process, in constant motion and interaction with the cycles of the land (Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014). The term *milo pimatisiwin* is not unique to Moose Cree. The Ojibwe people also use *pimadiziwin* to describe the central value of health and wellbeing (Manitowabi & Shawande, 2011). *Mnaamodzawin* is equivalent for the Anishnaabe people in Manitoulin Island, Ontario. It means a "good, holistic way of life" (Manitowabi & Shawande, 2011). Despite these differences in terminology, common values and common understanding weave together in this good life tapestry. "This [*mino pimatisiwin*] is a term used to describe holistic health and wellness, including physical, emotional, mental and spiritual stages of being" (Anderson, 2011, p. 7). Leanne Simpson (2011) explains that the knowledge of *mino bimaadiziwin* (the good life) exists in Indigenous theory, creation stories, teachings, and experiences. She explains that an identity grounded in the land "propels us towards *mino bimaadiziwin*" (p. 13).

In the last decade, Indigenous researchers have contributed to the appropriation use of the term *milo pimatisiwin* (Hart, 2010; LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012; Gross,

2014; Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014). This signals a new relationship between Indigenous and Western worldviews. It is an effort to translate Indigenous knowledge for the purposes of improving the conditions and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. The idea of *milo pimatisiwin* is increasingly being applied to various health and wellness initiatives. For example, Lawrence Gross's (2014) book *Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing and Being* refers to a board game called "Minobimaadiziwin: A Good Way of Life," developed for those who seek to reinforce the Anishinaabe value system. The verb "seeking" is often found in discussions of the good life. Seeking *milo pimatisiwin* implies a process of understanding and regenerating Indigenous wisdom, values, ethics, and ways of life. This goes beyond the tired binaries of the healthy and the unhealthy, the oppressor and the oppressed, the privileged and the marginalized.

Michael Hart of the Fisher River Cree Nation applies the idea of *milo pimatisiwin* to his research methodology in the field of social work. His aim, to address the social needs of Indigenous peoples, is presented through an Indigenous helping approach. He elaborates on five foundational concepts to achieve *milo pimatisiwin*: wholeness, balance, relationship, harmony, and healing. None of these concepts are hierarchical. Rather, they are steps on the path toward *milo pimatisiwin*, described as "healing, learning and life in general" (Hart, 2002, p. 44).

Gross's (2014) extensive research provides an in-depth look at *mino-bimaadiziwin*. His study examines this concept first within the traditional knowledge, and then looks at how it has been applied in the modern age. His critique challenges the notion that the Anishinaabe worldview—which he frames as Anishinaabe religion—

has been lost. He argues that the ethics of conducting one's life in a good way continues to exist today. "The teaching of *bimaadiziwin* operates at many levels. On a simple day-to-day basis, it suggests such actions as rising with the sun and retiring with the same. Further, *bimaadiziwin* governs human relations as well, stressing the type of conduct appropriate between individuals, and the manner in which social life is to be conducted" (Gross, 2014, p. 207). He goes on to say that the teachings, the *bimaadiziwin*, permeates the relationship to all life and facilitates a respect for all life, and for every stage of one's own life. Stories and storytelling are the methods used to transmit the teachings and "direct one's actions" (Gross 2014, p. 208). The ways of coming to know the good life—including "knowing one self and developing relationship with spirits [...] the Anishinaabe value system [...] respect for nature in general"—vary from fasting rituals to the development of the aforementioned board game "Minobimaadiziwin: A Good Way of Life" (p. 217). Gross's study asserts how the "teachings of *bimaadiziwin* are centered on living in this world" (p. 205). This speaks to the teachings of *bimaadiziwin* as the continuation of a living tradition that is still applicable in a contemporary context.

The Chisasibi Cree Nation healing model underlines the return to the land as a way to restore community wellness (Radu, House, & Pashagukum, 2014). This group refers to *miyupimaatissiun* as their Cree concept of wellness, or way of life.

Intergenerational knowledge transfer and experiential learning form the basis of this land-based initiative. Chisasibi Elders guide the program and assist the participants in rethinking the way that they relate to themselves and others. Framed within the broader commitment of decolonization and the reclaiming of Cree ways of healing and

wellness, living a good life “means to be able to hunt and trap and pursue other land-based activities, so that he or she has access to food and warmth and is able to enjoy life and to participate actively within the community” (Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014, p.95). The program situates Indigenous ways of healing and wellness as an approach to decolonizing current models of health care.

The Sacred Relationship project, a partnership between researchers and Cree Elders of Alberta, explores *milo pimatisiwin* in the context of the Canadian government’s current water policy (LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012). The project examines colonialist policies and ideologies of land ownership that have ruptured the good life. The participants argue for the reparation of Indigenous-settler relations to foster the good life for all Albertans. This is done in the context of understanding the meaning of water through the knowledge of *whakotowin*. Indigenous Elders such as Maria Campbell (2007) remember the cosmology of *whakotowin*, a term which means to honour and to respect all relations. Cree notions of kinship relations with “all my relations” including visible and invisible beings, spirits, animals and plants as well as human beings and even the earth itself, which is important for understanding “the land”, “land-based” activities and *mino pimatisiwn*. Anderson uses the laws of *whakotowin* to describe the arteries of the good life. *Whakotowin* theoretically informs her research on life stage cycles and reconstruction of native womanhood. She explains “how story-telling, the use of games, positive role modelling, and rites of passage ceremonies” were designed to facilitate the good life in child-rearing practices (Anderson, 2011, p. 68). Rite of passage ceremonies included the values of nurturing,

discipline, self-reliance, and interdependence through the entirety of one's individual and community life. Repeatedly it is said that the good life was not an individual goal. According to an Indigenous perspective of health and wellbeing, the good life is seen as a collective, shared responsibility mediated through life cycles and kin relations.

The concept of *milo pimatisiwin* plays a critical role in the decolonizing of notions of health and wellbeing in research practices and community-centred initiatives. Many Moose Cree First Nation people have shared their concerns about how they have moved away from ways of caring for one another—ways that were essential to land-based survival. The revival of *milo pimatisiwin* provides an excellent basis for breaking down social isolation and for restoring Cree practices of wellbeing, the values of family kinship systems, and the community itself.

Cree knowledge systems intersect with the language of the people. *Milo pimatisiwin* is embedded in the Cree language and in ways of being, doing, and thinking. It is a way of life. For this reason, it is difficult to understand the Cree conception of living and being well from a Western viewpoint. Seeking to understand Indigenous thought from the perspective of a Western worldview can reproduce Western ideas of health and wellbeing that privilege singular truth, linear and rationale thinking (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). In collaborative projects that are accountable to various stakeholders, the larger issue is attempting to find a language that bridges the academy and the community. It is important to avoid placing Cree ways of knowing into Western categories. It also remains vital to consider that notions of traditional and cultural knowledge differ among individuals within the community (Robins & Dewar, 2011).

Research has demonstrated the harmful effects of paternalism on community wellbeing and research (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009). Paternalistic attitudes have supplanted the ways of fostering *milo pimatisiwin*. Such attitudes are expressed and experienced as the dominance of one group over another. Paternalism is based on the Greek word for father; it is devoid of Mother. Yet, as Maria Campbell reminds us, women's role was to keep *whakotowin* together (Anderson, 2011). This was the adult women's role and responsibility. Yet attitudes of power over the "other" was and is widely practiced by governing bodies, including Band Councils and Canadian Indigenous political bodies, who believe they know what is best for Indigenous peoples. This approach has undermined Indigenous views and methods of health and wellbeing. Indigenous practices and research methodologies aim to breathe life into "cultural regeneration," meaning "a regeneration of indigenous cultural, spiritual, and political practices" (Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, & Coulthard, 2014, p. 111). Some of the methods of cultural regeneration being applied by Indigenous communities are being referred to as land-based pedagogy, land-based education, or land-based initiatives.

Land-based initiatives as *milo pimatisiwin*

In this study, I have come to understand land-based initiatives as a range of activities that, as Simpson (2014) explains, "comes through the land" (p. 9). "Activities" and "initiatives" are likely not the most useful terms to describe Indigenous methods of living because these are not stand-alone efforts. However, I will mainly use "land-based initiatives" or "land-based practices," as these are the most commonly applied terms in Moose Factory (or perhaps these were simply the terms presented to me, given that I

do not speak the Cree language). What is important to highlight in the context of land-based initiatives is that these activities can occur on traditional Cree lands, as well as within homes, schools, the community of Moose Factory, or even within the self. These activities are wide-ranging and difficult to compartmentalize, given that they relate to the co-existence of physical and spiritual life. All the activities that I refer to as land-based initiatives, such as hunting, trapping, fishing, harvesting, food preparation, picking medicines, storytelling, learning from Elders, life teachings, visiting, apprenticeship, and ceremonies, embody Cree cultural practices and Cree intelligence. Land-based initiatives are about survival and preservation, and are a form of education and experiential learning that takes place in the context of Cree peoples' relationship to the land. Similar to Dene peoples' land-based educational program as described by Coulthard and Simpson, the Cree people engaged in these initiatives learn to embody, and to live according to, Cree laws and self-determination (Simpson & Coulthard, 2014). Simpson and Coulthard refer to land-based education as "embodied resurgence." As with similar initiatives in other Indigenous communities, learning that comes through the land is often perceived from a Western viewpoint as non-educational or economically unsustainable, and is therefore not perceived as worthy of long-term funding (Simpson & Coulthard, 2014).

To further examine how land-based initiatives are framed from an Indigenous perspective, I draw on Indigenous scholars engaged in talking about and reconnecting with the land as part of cultural resurgence and decolonization (Alfred, 2014; Aldern and Goode, 2014; Simpson & Coulthard, 2014; Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, &

Coulthard, 2014). In her article “Land as Pedagogy,” Simpson (2014) describes the Nishnabeg concept of education as tied to the supportive kin relations required for a process of life-long learning that is embedded in teaching the value of a “reciprocated life” where education comes from the group up (Simpson 2014). Simpson reflects, “You can’t graduate from Nishnaabewin; it is a gift to be practiced and reproduced. And while each individual must have the skills and knowledge to ensure their own safety, survival and prosperity in both the physical and spiritual realm, their existence is ultimately dependent upon intimate relationships of reciprocity, humility, honesty and respect with all the elements of creation, including plants and animals” (pp. 9–10). Learning that comes through the land involves perceiving the land as teacher and healer (Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014; Simpson, 2014). There is also a social aspect worthy of being highlighted. The land-based programming at Chisasibi First Nations shows how social and familial relations start to mend and to heal through their respective life teachings (Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014). The process of learning from and with the land is entwined with the values of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility in relation to the cosmology of the land (La-Boucane-Benson et al., 2012). This process rejects a settler-colonial approach to learning that separates the learner from their environment further distancing the learner from the meaning of a “balanced relationship of mutuality” (Simpson, 2014, p. 12).

Given that settler-colonialism is based on individualism and on dispossessing Indigenous peoples of the land, land-based initiatives entail a conscious departure from Western compartmentalized notions of health and wellbeing. Learning that comes from

the land is guided by “the social relations, knowledges and languages that arise from the land” (Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, & Coulthard, 2014, p. I). The process of re-asserting Indigenous methods of learning from the land addresses what longs to be remembered. “The pairing of colonial domination with western education has had a devastating effect on Indigenous students, contributing to the contemporary educational deficit that expresses itself in lower academic success rates and experiences of racism and alienation in the classroom” (Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, & Coulthard 2014, p. III). Initiatives toward returning to the land promote Indigenous perspectives and cultural identifiers relating to what it means to sustain life. They are also a way of contesting settler-colonialism by changing how we see ourselves in relation to the land, and ultimately helping come to know and to embody the reciprocal obligations embedded in *whakotowin* (Campbell, 2007).

Robbins and Dewar’s (2011) research on Indigenous cultural practices includes a quote from James Louche which has helped me to theoretical grasp the significance of land as a factor in Indigenous perspectives on health and in Indigenous practices. He states:

With respect to the land, knowledge flows from the land and this is expressed in differences and diversity throughout Indigenous grounds. In contemporary society, this break with the land is the single most important factor in health problems among Indigenous peoples. Language is how knowledge is encoded. The belief among Elders is that Indigenous language developed organically from the land. Relationships need to be strengthened (whether it is relationship between people and the land or people and institutions). It is difficult to enter into healthy relationship with others if you are not strong in your identity, language, medicine, etc. (p. 13).

This speaks to a fact that is often stated in the literature on this topic—that land and wellbeing are not isolated from each other. In this study, we learn how land-based initiatives led by the Moose Cree First Nation contribute to the healing and regeneration of knowledge transmission, and to the survival of knowledge from the ground up, from Cree life principles, practices, and the Cree perspective on wellbeing. As we visited over coffee one morning, Omushkego Elder James Oliver Sutherland shared his view on Cree life principles. First, he said, “Cherish everything: bugs, trees, ground, water, etc. Do not tear it all up. It is there for you.” Second, he said, “We were trappers. Only kill what you need for the year. Plan ahead. Forecast what you will need. We always had enough of what we needed.” Third, he said, “Don’t try to take over women’s ideas and women’s life. It is the kids that suffer from this.” He added to this, “Do not hold other people in a captive style. This way, it works well to get along.” And lastly, “Do not try to control nature. It has a way of taking care of itself and balancing itself out” (James Oliver Sutherland, personal communication, July 25, 2015). To attempt to dominate is to disrupt the natural cycles of the earth, of animals, and of humans. He echoed what many other community members expressed—that the weakening of Cree ways of life has had grave consequences for youth and community wellbeing. I suggest that as a researcher, it is imperative to live an Indigenous research methodology in order to better respond and engage in Indigenous ideas of wellbeing, and more specifically, how land-based initiatives are a form of *milo pimatisiwin*. In return, the methodology lives through you.

Chapter Two: Rethinking Participatory Research with Indigenous Peoples

Situating Research and Researcher in the Participatory Paradigm

The willingness of the Moose Factory First Nations community in Ontario to be a part of this research study has opened new pathways for participatory research. Conceiving creative ways to engage in participatory research, in spite of contradictory norms, knowledge, and values, is often a challenge for both community members and academic researchers. Participatory research, a relatively new approach in academia, is both a theoretical and a methodological inquiry that emerged with the rise of critical Indigenous space and scholarship, encouraged by internationally recognized Maori scholars Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2000; 2012) and Russel Bishop (1998, 2005). The emergence of participatory research within social and health sciences stems from the awareness that research initiatives are enriched by the participation of the knowledge keepers themselves (McTaggart, 1994; Minkler, 2005; Smith, 1999).

In the last few decades, researchers have been encouraged to re-examine epistemological foundations as part of the methodological shift from an objective model of science to a humanistic approach. Colorado (1998) states that “the ground rules that should guide new practices are not immediately evident” (p. 98). Despite the uncertainties involved in these new practices, there is an increasing push to improve collaborative research partnerships with Indigenous communities. The literature suggests an urgency in taking ownership and responsibility for our actions, and choosing to do research differently. As a result, the differing views of ethics, science, and human action have brought to the fore what Leroy Little Bear refers to as “jagged worldviews colliding” (in Castellano, 2004, p. 103). “Indigenous world views assume that human action, to achieve social good, must be located in an ethical spiritual context

as well as its physical and social situation” (Castellano, 2004, p. 103). This speaks to a more holistic approach and re-situates the hierarchical way of doing research.

Some scholars argue for a participatory process that directly addresses the inevitable issues of power and control, thereby recognizing the limitations of the methodology (Varcoe et al., 2011). In this chapter, I seek to understand the ways in which participatory research either re-inscribes or challenges dominant relations of power. This is as a step towards what Maori education scholar Bishop describes as a “participatory mode of consciousness” (quoted in Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008, p. 14). “The participatory mode of knowing privileges sharing, subjectivity, personal knowledge, and the specialized knowledge of oppressed groups. It uses concrete experience as a criterion for meaning and truth” (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008, p. 14). From this understanding of participatory research, I will integrate the teachings that emerged from my work as a Métis scholar doing research with a Moose Cree First Nation community in the James Bay region of Northern Ontario.

Over the past few decades, the literature has offered ethical thought, guidelines, and experiences related to research practices that avoid reinforcing imbalanced power relations (Castellano, 2004; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Smith, 1999). To highlight its practical application, Castellano (2004) explains ethics according to the humanistic approach to research: “Ethics, as the rules of right behaviour, are intimately related to who you are, the deep values you subscribe to and your understanding of place in the spiritual order of reality” (p. 103). An ethical relationship, with the self at the centre of our research practices, can help us to move away from subjugation and toward

engagement with knowledge keepers involved in the research. Such a way of conceiving ethics serves to remind us that relationship comes from an understanding of where we place ourselves in the “spiritual order of our reality” (Castellano, 2004, p. 103). One’s epistemological foundation and theoretical lens define the mode of participatory engagement and thought, beyond what is true for the participants themselves (Denzin, Lincoln, Smith, 2008). The alignment of theory with methodology has inspired a shift in the power dynamics of researcher and researched.

Castellano’s understanding of ethics has helped me to learn and to unlearn how I am meant to “do,” and to “be” in, research. Prior to my ambiguously conceived relationship-building field trip to Moose Factory, Ontario, Maria Campbell strongly advised me to be grounded in who I am and the place from which I come. “Otherwise people will know you are snooping around in their business” (Maria Campbell personal communication, June 2013). She was right. A few days into the trip, a young woman from the community asked me, in the midst of awkward questioning as we walked to a café for lunch, whether I was an undercover cop. It was a revealing moment, and I immediately understood the Elder’s forewarning. The young woman’s keen perception welcomed an examination of my transparency and seriousness. The quiet voice from within nudged me to disclose my insecurities about the value of my academic research on the community. I shared with the young woman the teachings passed on by Maria before my departure. The young woman’s tender words, “I’d like to be an undercover cop someday,” put me at ease and further confirmed that the youth have much to teach me. This exchange was the beginning of a process that would continue to inform my human and ethical approach to participatory research. It also helped me to

contextualize what scholars mean by “participatory” within the methodological and theoretical principles of Indigenous research.

Given my interest in applying critical Indigenous theories and methodologies to my research study, I have examined mainstream literature on participatory research and its subtypes, including participatory action and community-based research. Literature on these methodologies offers varied insights into the ways in which dominant relations of power are challenged or re-inscribed. I will weave throughout this chapter some of the distinctions made by Indigenous scholars. The focus on Indigenous epistemology offers a distinct perspective on the power differentials that play out in current research initiatives concerning the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples (Louis, 2007).

The critical examination of power relations remain central to participatory research. The political, economic, spiritual, and social landscapes of Indigenous communities continue to be fraught with proverbial undercover cops (Louis, 2007; Simpson, 2001). De-centring power and knowledge arguably supports a transformative and healing approach to research, an approach that moves beyond a Western-based participatory framework upheld by superficial checks and balances (Chilisa, 2011; Louis, 2007). Implying that there is a singular methodology compartmentalizes the power of the research participants themselves. When working within an Indigenous context, participatory research is meant to uphold at its centre the views of Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2011). This premise leads me to an exchange that revealed the struggle of weaving together three threads: academia, prayer, and truth.

Endeavouring to work with a participatory methodology required surrendering what I, as the “researcher,” thought the process should be—the data required, the theoretical lens to apply, and the need to look for something in particular. It was humbling and at times deeply uncomfortable. Yet I had moments of feeling liberated in my abandonment of the internalized academic and intellectual rigour. I was reminded of these moments with every transfer from the Air Canada flight to Thunder Air or Air Creebec, or on the Polar Bear Express from Cochrane to Moosonee. The landscapes, the vastness, and the generosity of the people reminded me to see, sense, perceive, and hear from within. Although this seemed like a radical approach in a world of research that demands results, hypothesis, proof, and timelines, it was becoming a way to remain grounded and to connect with a force greater than my own. I was comforted by the Kaupapa Maori research model, which asks us to consider more deeply the principles of participatory and collaborative research that are epistemologically inspired and defined (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith 2008). As Wapistan urged, “relax.”

Defining Participatory Research

Some basic definitions of the participatory subtypes can assist in re-situating ourselves within this research methodology. Community-based research is defined as an approach that focuses on community as opposed to individuals (Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009). It is a collaborative research process that “engages multiple stakeholders, including the public and community providers, who affect and are affected by a problem of concern” (Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009, p. 2633). Ideally, the problem of concern emerges directly from the community itself (Denzin, Lincoln, &

Smith, 2008). The initiation of the research itself varies according to multiple factors. In some cases, the community independently initiates the research and works in collaboration with a researcher or research community (Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009).

Participatory action research is another approach that includes well thought out planning strategies and stages to direct action and social change (McTaggart, 1994). Parker (1993) refers to participatory action research as “a means of putting research capabilities in the hands of the deprived and disenfranchised peoples so that they transform their lives for themselves” (p. 1). Chilisa (2012) presents two types of participatory action research, “one with an emphasis on participants as co-researchers and another with an emphasis on personal and social transformation” (p. 225). At the outset, these diverse explanations embody a prevailing belief that participation is unequivocally beneficial for the community. For such reasons, Smith (2000) poses a series of critical questions to assist the researcher in challenging structures of oppression: “What research do we want to do? Whom is it for? What difference will it make? Who will carry it out? How do we want the research done? How will we know it is worthwhile? Who will own the research? Who will benefit?” (p. 239). Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith (2008) further explain “that these eight questions serve to interpret critical theory through a moral lens, through key indigenous principles” (p. 10). The questions serve to create a space for research beyond privilege and towards what Frye (1998) calls circle consciousness. Anderson (2011) explains how the circle seeks to restore

relational accountability, responsibility, care, and nurturing in community-centred initiatives.

There is a general emphasis on tenets in the descriptions of the various subtypes of participatory research, such as community-based research and participatory action research. The literature includes the principles of co-learning, experiential methods, shared knowledge practices, respectful relationships, and mutually beneficial results (Getty, 2010; Minkler, 2005; Smith, 1999). Reflecting on the implications, we are cautioned not to assign meaning without a careful examination of epistemology (Getty, 2010). “Accordingly, these may require reflection to identify historically bound belief and power systems that explicate domination or marginalization” (Getty, 2010, p. 11). It is increasingly evident from the literature that epistemological tensions emerge through participatory efforts (Chilisa, 2011; Getty, 2010). In seeking to examine this emerging theme, I refer back to the epistemological participatory approach found in the Kaupapa Maori Research model in New Zealand. Their model of a theoretical and humanistic approach to research destabilizes dominant power relations (Smith 2000).

I feel fortunate as a scholar to have on hand an array of literature and guidance that seeks to break down the hierarchical barriers within participatory research (Colorado, 1988; Getty, 2010; Kovach 2009; Smith, 1999). These leanings have led to integrating ethical rigour (such as co-authorship), community engagement, working with Elders, going home, ceremony, and critical self-reflexivity processes to facilitate equitable partnerships between community members and academic researchers (Getty, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Minkler, 2005). The emphasis on community participation in

research has resulted in analysis of the epistemic differentials inherent in a mode of inquiry. This awareness is increasingly being applied in research. It has led to critical thinking as to whether Western models continue to prevail in knowledge-making, unwittingly masquerading in a participatory cloak.

Situating Distinctions in Knowledge

Much of the literature addresses the complexities and varying factors that influence participatory legitimacy and its effectiveness in overcoming and re-informing relations of power (Castellano, 1993; Varcoe et al., 2011). Discourse on dominant relations of power within the context of participatory research can be obscured when focusing on the acquisition of knowledge—its source, legitimacy, and production (Smith, 1999). While seeking to discuss the power differential within the institution-community collaborative paradigm, scholars have not arrived at an absolute position defining and opposing principles on this issue. It is important to note that critical thinking is not meant to further polarize epistemological differences and knowledge systems. On the contrary, the participatory research process is shaped by the quality of relationships, dynamics, and competing interests between the various parties, the various levels of authority (of the community, the researched population, the researcher, and the funding body), and the socio-political and cultural environment (Castellano, 1993; Minkler, 2005; St. Denis, 1992; Varcoe et al., 2011). St. Denis (1992) forewarns that “it is unrealistic to expect homogeneity in any community or group” (p. 64). There is no single Indigenous epistemology, as each person and/or community expresses knowledge uniquely based on stories, personal experiences, and ways of

knowing and being (Deloria, 1991, 1999). Beck, Walters, and Francisco (1977) explain that there is no homogenous template and no mathematical formula to explain what is logical at the depth of one's humanity.

Examining the literature on Indigenous epistemology, we can conclude that there is no cookie-cutter system of coming to knowledge (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Deloria, 1999; Ermine, 1995; Simpson 2011). Yet there are laws, practices, protocols, and standards that distinguish what Colorado (1988) describes as "Native Science" and similarly what Deloria (1999) refers to as the "Science of wholeness." Although group ethics are situated in a local context, ways of coming to knowledge are diverse, personal, intimate, and incapable of being reduced to one another (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Ermine, 1995; Kovach, 2005).

The phrase "coming to knowledge," as expressed by Colorado (1988), signifies the reciprocal approach with which Indigenous people relate to knowledge. Simpson says that "coming to know is an intimate process, the unfolding of relationship with the spiritual world" (2014, p. 15). Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000) expand on the value of reciprocity and relationship to ensure that methodologies "flow from Indigenous values, such as community accountability, giving back, and benefitting the community, and that the researcher is a helper committed to doing no harm" (p. 48). Notably, expecting intellectual conformity and linearity in participatory research reinscribes dominant relations of power. As such, it becomes difficult to connect deeply with the heart of the people and our own humanity (Holmes, 2000; Kovach, 2005). Subscribing knowingly or unknowingly to an imposing approach to research (such as pre-determined questions, processes, and results, as discussed earlier) leads to re-

enacting epistemological conflict and risks dismissing Indigenous knowledge (Castellano, 1993, 2004; Simpson, 2001; Varcoe et al., 2011). It further compromises the collective capacity to creatively explore and experience new, mutual forms of dialogue and power.

Knowledge and Purpose

St. Denis (1992) addresses the relevance of examining notions of equality in community-based research, observing that “for so long First Nations communities have been led to believe and forced to accept that members of the colonial society can and should act on their behalf” (p. 65). Notions of equality subsumed by sameness and conformity, as Ermine (1995) suggests, constrict the self-knowledge of the research goal itself and further reinforce a Eurocentric roadmap for research. Barnhardt and Kawagley (1999) demonstrate how knowledge for Indigenous peoples has been informed by a process of observing, doing, and living in relationship to others, including place, land, nature, and cosmology. Louis (2007) states that “from an Indigenous perspective, the search for knowledge is considered a spiritual journey” (p. 134).

Beck, Walters, and Francisco (1977) explain that knowledge developed through oral traditions is embodied in the flesh of Native American people and thus counters dominating discourses that falsely portray Indigenous peoples’ way of life as uncivilized. More recent literature continues to reference ways in which the Western mindset and Western science differ from Indigenous thought and philosophy (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Getty, 2010). Within this dichotomy, the Western mindset—or rather, worldview—is predisposed to produce knowledge for the

purposes of progress and, at times, our own academic endeavours. The Indigenous worldview produces practical knowledge for specific cultural effects and for preserving the survival of the respective society's social order (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Kovach, 2005). It is important to be aware of these differences in order to foster maturity in our research practices.

Castellano (2004) explains that the focus on cultural renewal speaks to “restoring order to daily living in conformity with ancient and enduring values that affirm life” (p. 100). Holmes (2000) speaks of the purpose of knowledge as being to “incite humans to act in such ways as to ensure the protection and reproduction of all creations in the universe” (p. 37). Deloria (1999) conceptualizes this goal as a process of self-discipline, undertaken to acquire knowledge in order to live a “life of freedom” (p. 43). He further states that approaching knowledge requires “finding the proper moral and ethical road” (Deloria, 1999, p. 43). He also explains how some Western paradigms seek to acquire knowledge for “its own sake” in order to replicate that which often cannot be reproduced (Deloria, 1999, p. 44). Knowledge within such a theory is therefore restricted by a rigid and absolute code of ethics that disrupts the natural development of different ways of knowing (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000). Deloria (1999) explains that the challenge for the academic is “to find the proper pattern of interpretation for the great variety of ordinary and extraordinary experience we have” (p. 46). According to Getty (2010), the interpretations of meaning made within a Western framework re-inscribe the dominant power relations, blaming Indigenous peoples for their own social reality.

I have come to realize that applying a participatory approach without being grounded in my own culture and without an awareness of my own biases risks diminishing the chances of having Indigenous concerns, peoples, and systems at the centre of my research. “Culture comes from the way that people live together, the way people treat each other, and the way they interact with one another” (Anderson, 2011, p. 167). In my conversations with Maria Campbell pertaining to an Indigenous theoretical framework, the theme of traditions of the land became central to my exploration. Her suggestion was to seek a body of knowledge that came from home, land, and methods of living that shaped and informed the manner in which I perceive the world. This process would ensure that my research remains grounded in who I am, and that I am vigilant with respect to the interests and priorities of the O mushkego people. I soon became aware that without this grounding, feelings of insecurity and inadequacy had emerged to the surface.

In an effort to better understand culture as defined above, my various conversations with family led to narratives of the land. The words of my relatives echoed the work of various scholars who invoke culturally-based knowledge as the basis of their theoretical frameworks (Absolon 2011; Anderson, 2011; Dorion, 2010; Kovach, 2009). Robbins’ and Dewar’s research on traditional Indigenous practices makes reference to James Louche, who explains how culture is informed by land. He states that

With respect to the land, knowledge flows from the land and this is expressed in differences and diversity throughout Indigenous grounds. In contemporary society, this break with the land is the single most important factor in health problems among Indigenous peoples. Language is how knowledge is encoded. The belief among Elders is that Indigenous language developed organically from

the land. Relationships need to be strengthened (whether it is relationship between people and the land or people and institutions). It is difficult to enter into healthy relationship with others if you are not strong in your identity, language, medicine, etc. (Robbins and Dewar, 2011, p. 13)

While struggling to understand more fully my own relationship to the culture and the land (both cognitively and spiritually), I was not surprised to get some insight from Clayton Cheechoo, a youth worker at the John Delaney Youth Centre in Moose Factory. During one of our conversations, he felt that perhaps I was in Moose Factory to learn something about myself and to find something I had lost. I nodded in agreement and, once again, was comforted by the permission to be vulnerable and transparent. As our sharing continued, he offered a perspective that would shape my culturally-based approach to research. Clayton steered me toward his Cree worldview.

We as Indigenous peoples were given a Sacred Law from the *Shamundoo* (meaning God in Cree) for harmony to be in this world. We (The People) are equal to Nature not above or below, to control or disrespect that sacred law, is what is happening today as we see it unfold. That every Nation throughout Mother Earth was given a Prayer, Song and a place to Live (Home land) within Mother Earth. The first “fire” was given as a gift from *Shamundoo* which we call The Sacred Fire, (*Pii-mattisiun*) meaning life in Cree. We (Indigenous) live in two worlds today, the first is the sacred law and the second the economic law that controls all life today as we know it. These two worlds creates a deep conflict within the Indigenous Peoples on Mother Earth, it forces us to decide which of the two will be guiding US in this world today (nature or money) for the harmony that was given as a Gift (Life). Each person on Mother Earth is given a choice, by *Shamundoo*, it is up to us (Humanity), how we weave the Braid of Life (*Pii-matissuin*) (Clayton Cheechoo, personal communication, December 19, 2013).

Later, reflecting on our conversations, I realized that Clayton is a living example of a humanistic approach to participating and partnering with life. The worldview expressed above asserts the interconnected nature of research and culture, the

challenges we face, and the choices we are being called to make as researchers to foster *pii-matissuin*.

When the process of coming to knowledge is absent of self-knowledge, then “knowledge exists apart from human beings and their communities” (Deloria, 1999, p. 44). For Deloria (1999), knowledge risks standing alone, campaigning on its own behalf. Getty (2010) explains that “traditionally research studies of Indigenous Peoples’ lives that have been conducted by Western academics have examined the former’s lives from a colonial perspective rather than recognizing their Indigenous world views, or ways of viewing life and the world around them” (p. 5). Although much of the literature provides extensive guidelines to engage communities to participate in the ownership of the research, in many cases there is little evidence to show which stakeholder groups influence decision-making (Cargo et al., 2003; Riecken et al., 2005).

Situating Knowledge in Participatory Research

A participatory mode of research on Indigenous thought seeks a deeper inquiry, to examine the process of situating relationship as a central component. How do I see myself in relationship to the community? Who I am being in this research? Where do I come from? Why is this research important? Subjectivity is one of the fundamental principles of participatory research. For Ermine (1995) subjectivity is the process of coming to know from within given that the “inward space where the real power lies” (p. 108). From this perspective, participatory research seeks to legitimize Indigenous production of knowledge—the ways of thought, learning, relating, and communicating. Separating knowledge from its source results in a power imbalance as knowledge

becomes detached from the person from whom the knowledge originates. Without recognition of the influence of subjectivity, researchers may further sustain dichotomies through the generations (Fyre, 1998; Varcoe et al., 2011). Fyre (1998) explains that “categories such as ‘white’ or ‘indian’ are not ‘natural’ divisions, but rather are products of history and politics” (p. 21). These dichotomies were introduced with assimilation strategies, and were reinforced in research (Fyre, 1998). In the literature about the James Bay Cree peoples’ way of life, Preston (2002) describes how dichotomy is not appropriate in Cree culture, “but rather [is] an artifact of Western and other cultures” (p. 157). He further explains that the Cree worldview distinguishes the different functions within certain types of relationship.

Subjectivity engages researchers in recognizing themselves as a part of the research and as part of the community (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). It is through relationship with community that I am able to decolonize within myself the etchings of a divided mindset. By doing so, I am able to delve deeper, and to untangle my own preconceptions of participatory research. At the University of Ottawa’s first Indigenous Right to Play Research Committee meeting, Kim Anderson, Métis Cree scholar and mentor, asked us to deeply consider the team’s interest in working with Indigenous communities. I took her guidance to heart and began to look within, asking myself “Why”? “Why is this research study important to me?” This led me to ask the community why they felt the initial research study I had intended to do was important. Their responses redirected the purpose and objective of the research project. Unknowingly, I had assumed that my research interests were also the interests of the Moose Factory community. As I stepped out of my own concerns, the new research

pathway offered itself through an old man's story (Gaudet & Louttit 2014). His story had to do with a deeply rooted memory that spoke of the connection between young and old and that was grounded in the cosmology of the land. While digesting his personal story for over a year, I was able better imagine the function of research as a service to communities' needs, and can confront settler-coloniality

Kim Anderson's wisdom has inspired me to invite researchers, students, and development practitioners to reflect on the same "why" question. Most are unsure of a response that will satisfy their objectives. I understand that it can be a challenge to put a voice to this question, out of fear of being perceived as an undercover cop and reinscribing power relations. Yet I am consoled by the space between each breath, inviting my humanity to be remembered. I too continue to seek the answer to "why" with respect to my own research interests. Maria Campbell explained that this requires looking back into my own life history, method of living, norms, and cultural values.

The quality of self-inquiry or self-knowing in participatory methodology is often mentioned in the literature (Chilisa, 2011). It is an aspect of decolonizing the self from within and knowing where we come from in terms of "our spiritual order." Castellano (2004) points us to "the class of prevailing norms of western research" that dictate participatory research (p. 98). She argues that research that is governed by outside researchers "has been instrumental in rationalizing colonialist perceptions of Indigenous incapacity and the need for paternalistic control" (Castellano, 2004, pp. 102–103). The exposure of ill-defined relationships embedded in colonial practices confirms Smith's (1999) argument that participatory language assumes that the

research will be legitimized as an act of service “for the greater good of Indigenous peoples” (p. 2). Smith (1999) demands that research as a service be based on the voices and experiences of the people themselves. As such, she and other scholars call upon researchers to counter dominant power relations by holding sacred the stories of Indigenous peoples (Anderson, 2011; Wilson, 2008). Increasingly, Indigenous resurgence at the center of our research intervenes with settler-colonialism and advocates for critical self-reflexivity and concerted social engagement.

According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2000), dominant relations of power are challenged when the community thinks about “where they are now, how things came to be that way, and from these starting points, how, in practice, things might be changed” (p. 573). Turner (2006) strongly suggests that an important step to altering paternalistic power dynamics is for communities to establish clarity around how Indigenous knowledge is to be used in legal and political discourse. Mainstream models often have limited application in meeting the holistic realities of Indigenous peoples.

Simpson (2001) argues that participatory research led by researchers from outside of the community represents a modern-day trend to hide “whiteness” (the dominant worldview) and to appropriate knowledge without doing the heavy lifting to acquire this knowledge. Simpson (2001) calls upon Indigenous researchers and communities to conduct research on their own terms, using their own theories, methodologies, philosophies, and epistemologies. From my conversations with scholars, and from the literature, it would appear that the guidance of Elders and the community can provide additional clarity in terms of what this looks like practically, for

both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars. What we know is that this process does not come without its own discipline and rigour. Simpson (2001) and many other scholars describe their own personal decolonization and healing, a process of renewing cultural knowledge at the centre of our everyday living. Simpson (2001) advocates a process of critical self-inquiry by the non-Indigenous researcher as a way to challenge the normality of knowledge production dominated by institutions.

Horowitz, Robinson, and Seifer (2009) further suggest that collapsing the notion of objectivity is vital in order for researchers to embody an empathetic and humble view of local practices and knowledge. For Smith (1999), it is imperative within decolonization strategies that researchers be “concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations, and values which inform research practices” (p. 21). If they can achieve this, Butler (2004) explains how researchers can play a role in facilitating a research process that is sensitive to community priorities and respectful of cultural notions of progress and success. In turn, this challenges dominant relations of power, as knowledge comes from the community itself, and is generated for the use of the community. Turner’s (2006) insights offer consideration of a tension that researchers often allude to in participatory research. He points to the embedded colonial norms within the communities’ everyday lives. As a result, he says, “colonization is not intellectualized in the communities”; rather, “it is embedded in the everydayness of indigenous life: language, religion, sexuality, art, philosophy, and politics” (Turner, 2006, p. 109). This entrenched reality is often deeply misunderstood by researchers. Failure to understand the historical and local impact of historical trauma can re-inscribe researchers’ power to define the issues, jeopardize the

partnership, and unknowingly lead to misinterpreting and misappropriating cultural knowledge (Chilisa, 2011).

Structure and Knowledge

Some scholars argue for a deeper understanding of the social and political context in which the imbalance of funding bodies is constructed (Briggs & Sharp, 2004; Castellano, 1993). This issue has augmented the one-sided scrutiny most often dictated by institutions. Castellano (1993) discusses how the current structural deficiency has created a need for third parties to mediate between the state and Indigenous communities. This approach, she suggests, “devolves responsibility to community institutions” (p. 150). Under these circumstances, the third parties in question, either researchers or governmental organizations, have been valorized as most responsible for the dissemination of findings, the accountability of fund management, and achieving the desired government outcomes. In this context, participatory research can represent a mere conduit between the academy and the community.

The larger dilemma for research is attempting to find a language that bridges the academy and the community, so as not to begin to categorize the local episteme according to one’s assumptions (Chilisa, 2011; Kovach, 2005). This has provoked questions related to ownership of research and its use outside the local context (Chilisa, 2011). Categorizing and misinterpreting local knowledge can be one of the ways in which participatory research re-inscribes power imbalances. As such, conveying the importance of fluidity, relationality, and conceptualizations of identity is vital to transforming methodological homogeneity in research (Battiste & Youngblood

Henderson, 2000; Colorado, 1988; Kovach, 2005). I would further add that being adept in listening with three ears (two ears and the heart) can disrupt the hierarchy of knowledge and moral order (Wilson, 2008).

For many Indigenous scholars, reclaiming cultural identity, oral traditions, and storytelling situates local epistemology as foundational to the production of knowledge in research (Anderson, 2011; Battiste, 2000; Castellano, 1993, 2004; Kovach, 2005). The participatory process suggests that the subject(s) of inquiry be subjective, self-directed, and organized, based on the commitment of the social group (McTaggart, 1994). For Parker (1993), such an approach becomes a useful intervention strategy that calls for a will to change through action. The use of words such as “intervention” implies the involvement of an outside party; in this case the researcher would assume the role of “external change agent” (Parker, 1993, p. 9). Varcoe, Brown, Calam, Buchanan, and Newman (2011) argue that the assumed role of change agents legitimizes academic researchers as more knowledgeable than the community itself in finding solutions. “Underlying assumptions also may suggest that such efforts are inherently ‘good’ for Indigenous peoples, with little attention paid to how such strategies constitute another form of colonization” (Varcoe et al., 2011, p. 211). Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) caution against the disguise of participatory research as social activism. They argue that “this can be another form of deception and manipulation” couched in the practice of participatory research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 568). Although ongoing dialogue is a central theme in the literature, it is suggested that the voice of researchers, not only in academic writing and the interpretation of knowledge,

but also in dialogue itself, remains the dominating authority (Reicken et al., 2005; Strong, Israel, Schulz, & Reyes, 2009; Varcoe et al., 2011).

Chilisa (2012) advocates a participatory approach that is transformative for all parties. She suggests a shift in thinking, from a “deficit based inquiry” to an “appreciative inquiry” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 243). This approach, she argues, can effectively change the mindset both of the researcher and the community members (Chilisa, 2012). With a shift from conventional participation to a view of researcher and community as co-researchers, the research infrastructure is reconstructed outside a Western research framework, and draws strength from within a cultural context (Chilisa, 2012). Varcoe, Brown, Calam, Buchanan, and Newman (2011) attest that “without critical attention to underlying presumptions conveyed by research conventions, even research [that] purports to be decolonizing in intent can re-inscribe rather than resist and replace colonizing practices” (p. 212). Using a collective approach to participatory research rather than an individuated approach challenges, according to Minkler (2005), the homogenous rubber-stamp measurements that legitimize scientific proof as solitary truth.

The integration of local epistemology can reconceptualize the traditional relationship between the researcher as expert and the researched as subservient. With this integration, the privileged position of the researcher can momentarily be neutralized, and the interaction transformed into a “democratic dialogue,” blurring the lines of the dichotomous relationship of researcher and community (Fyre, 1998; Reicken et al., 2005). Yet according to Parker (1993), the logistics—or rather “spiral of

steps” to defining the problem, assembling the key players, communicating the process, and disseminating the data—are ultimately led by the researcher. Some of the literature has identified this positioning as re-inscribing power relations and undermining community ownership, decision making, and knowledge transfer. To address these concerns, a space for respectful dialogue between academic researchers and the community is crucial. Reciprocity, respect, responsibility, and relationship, which are interrelated, are at the centre of Indigenous principles (Kovach, 2005). Being grounded in Indigenous cultural protocol is a means to creating such spaces, and to living according to these principles.

Maria Campbell explains that our sources of knowledge come directly from the relationships that are made. Anderson (2011) points out that “it takes much longer to build the types of relationship that oral history requires than validation of research through Western-based theories” (p. 20). This is another example of the points of tension that destabilize the Western viewpoint of progress. Within these points of tension, we can begin to redefine, from an Indigenous perspective, the characteristics that produce knowledge. Furthermore, the practice of reciprocal models of relationship can begin to crystallize when conducting research with Indigenous peoples themselves, rather than about Indigenous peoples. Although these efforts are identified as central to overcoming power differentials, they do not negate the need to take responsibility for history, nor do they negate the manner in which “contemporary society reinforces (dichotomy)” (Fyre, 1998, p. 22).

Indigenous methodologies are not only significant as methodological tools, but also as unique forms of expression, representing the act of engaging in relationship within a decolonizing framework (Chilisa, 2012). Kovach (2009) states that the community-based research approach is a Western methodology intended “to counteract the heinous reputation of Western research in indigenous communities” (p. 13). Decentring mainstream methodological approaches can challenge dominant power relationships when research is done as ceremony (Wilson, 2008). The principles of circle consciousness which Fyre (1998) describes also allow for a participatory approach, nourishing a new point of balance within ourselves and within our research practice.

There is a growing body of literature that demonstrates the manner in which scholars have effectively applied the participatory research approach to community research within an Indigenous framework (Anderson, 2011; Lavalley, 2009; McBee, 2012; Reicken et al., 2005). From their stories, I have learned that participatory research calls for ongoing fluidity and collaboration, as both the researcher and the community will situate themselves differently at different points in time (Cargo et al., 2003). In order to bring about social justice, collaborative research must aim to reach “the larger context of regional community networks, inter-societal relations, and institutional development so that local participatory action may be completed and enhanced” (Castellano, 1993, p. 154). For Castellano (1993), the successful integration of participatory research requires a balance of both internal and external structures. A consideration for balance extends itself to the use of methods applied. The theoretical and methodological approach informs and guides our research methods. In the context

of this study, the research methods were influenced by my time in the community and their approach to knowledge gathering.

Research Methods

Indigenous scholars have used a wide range of methods in their research. Indigenous methods are particular approaches and practices for gathering knowledge that are linked to an Indigenous methodological inquiry (Kovach, 2008). Kovach explains that Indigenous knowledge-gathering methods such as ceremony, story, talking circles, traditional teachings, reflexivity, oral history, and journaling are congruent to tribal epistemologies. She points out that these methods may differ from Western ones, such as focus groups, interviews, and surveys. Drawing from both her own experience and from the work of other Indigenous scholars, Kovach argues that the “crucial difference is that Indigenous researchers count inward knowing ways as part of knowledge construction and referencing methods, subsequently legitimizing them in academic research” (Kovach, 2008, p. 127). She also suggests that for research methods centred on community concerns and tribal epistemology, the needs of the researcher must not dominate the research (Kovach, 2008).

Indigenous research methods and methodologies are influenced from within, by the way we live, relate to, and treat one another. Just as important, our choice of methods must be based on recovering and reclaiming ways of “creating and living a good life” (Absolon, 2011, p. 66). For this study, I began with the method of unstructured interviews, which is a qualitative process of inquiry guided by open-ended questions (Hatch, 2002). The interview process typically began with a question

seeking to understand an Indigenous conception of the land. At the incipient stages of my research, I had little awareness of other options within academia. The unstructured interview process was my starting point, gathering perspectives from the community about the importance of youth connecting with the land. But many people I spoke to suggested that the best way to learn about a Cree perspective on health and wellbeing in relation to the land was by doing. In doing, visiting and unscripted conversations inevitably occurred, which inspired my exploration of Indigenous inquiry as a distinct methodology with its respective epistemology and core values (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2008).

Learning by doing

Learning by doing became my primary method for knowledge gathering. At first, I was somewhat surprised that when I asked for an interview, the response was typically: meet me at the complex for coffee, we will take you out to our camp, or for a boat ride in the bay, or we will pick sweetgrass, or come sweat, or come dance, or come help me create this song, or join us for our garage sales. Their methods were linked to actively participating in relation to the land, actively participating in community life, or actively participating in everyday social activities, and at the same time, I was actively participating in my own process of transformation. I came to understand that learning by doing is inherent in land-based societies. Wionna Wheeler explains that “doing oral history the Cree way is as much about social relations as acquiring information... Oral history is unique from literate traditions because they are as much about social interaction as it was about knowledge and transmission... Oral traditions are living, interactive and participatory by nature” (in Absolon, 2011, pp. 70–71). Going to a sweat

ceremony, going to check the traplines, gathering wood, getting on a skidoo, going to the local café, celebrating the ancestors, feasting the bear spirit, going to a family birthday party, visiting over dinner, and even plucking geese for the first time were the methods of doing through social interaction that deepened my understanding of *milo pimatisiwin* and land-based initiatives.

Leanne Simpson applies the learning by doing method in her research (Absolon, 2011). She describes the various ways of doing that she took part in, and explains that this was seen by the Elders and community members as a teaching method.

Learning by doing was a central method chosen by the Elders and community experts to teach me. For me, it meant participating, experiencing, and reflecting in a number of activities in spiritual, emotional, physical and mental dimensions. I went on hunting trips, out to fishnets, and participated in sweat lodges and shaking tent ceremonies. I camped on the land a number of times with community members, and observed healing and sentencing circles. I participated in a number of smudging ceremonies and sharing circles. I was also asked to share my dreams and visions (Absolon, 2011, p. 134).

Simpson further links the method of learning by doing to the process of becoming self-knowledgeable. The physical element of doing is also linked to being. Wilson (2008) refers to methods of learning by doing as “participant observation.” He emphasizes relationships, sharing, and watching in order to learn and to assess. My research on Indigenous research methodologies and my learning from the Moose Factory community has reminded me of my experiences back home. Learning by doing was instilled in me through my upbringing in a farming community. In my role as an Elder’s helper in ceremony and in community gatherings, learning was by doing. This is a form of apprenticeship whereby knowledge is transmitted through participation and

interaction with what is happening here and now. This transmission is not bound solely to words or instructions; presence is vital.

I mostly became comfortable with this process, though I had doubts about how I could bring it all together in a dissertation. Learning by doing is a method that invites social relations and stillness of mind in the process of gathering knowledge. Inward ways of knowing are fostered through this method, and according to Kovach's (2009) study of Indigenous research methodology, "Indigenous researchers count inward ways of knowing as part of knowledge construction and referencing methods, subsequently legitimizing them in academic research" (p. 127). This brings us back to the idea of a tribal epistemology that works with both inner and outer ways of knowing—knowledge that comes from both the self and the collective. Conversation, another Indigenous method, contributes to this balance.

Conversational Method

Margaret Kovach (2010), an Indigenous educator from Saskatchewan of Plains Cree and Saulteaux ancestry, explains that the conversational method in Indigenous research "involves a dialogic participation that holds a deep purpose of sharing story as a means to assist others. It is relational at its core" (p. 40). Solidarity is affirmed in speaking our truth. The conversational method "is an attempt to show self in relation to others [...] this allows readers to interpret the conversation from their own particular vantage points and take from the teachings what they need" (Kovach, 2009, p. 53). From this perspective, a conversation deepens the process of reflexivity and deters us from a deficit-focused knowledge base.

Kovach (2010) describes conversation as a research method stemming from an Indigenous epistemology. Conversations offer a form of learning, teaching, and seeking multiple truths. They permit us to move beyond duality, to grow in our knowledge and experiences, and to depart from compartmentalized concepts, such as Western ideas of health and wellbeing. Conversations can also elucidate our understanding of colonial systems and help move us toward the renewal of Indigenous thought and stories.

Conversations can play a critical role in this process of a return to harmony and dignity. They can help us recognize and empathize with when we are complicit to shameful decisions, beliefs, and actions (Eigenbrod, 2012). Kovach (2010) explains that “the conversational method aligns with an Indigenous worldview that honours orality as a means of transmitting knowledge and upholds the relational which is necessary to maintain a collectivist tradition” (p. 42). African American author bell hooks (2010) offers a compelling argument in her book *Teaching Critical Thinking and Practical Wisdom*: “Conversation—true conversation—is the way we cleanse poisons, such as false assumption, prejudices, ignorance, misinformation, lack of perspective, lack of imagination, and stubbornness from the system” (p. 46). And Opaskwayak Cree writer Shawn Wilson (2008) describes conversation as inclusive of both sharing and listening—a way to enrich our diverse roles and responsibilities within community life, work, and research.

Kovach (2009) describes the conversational method as non-structured ways to come to knowledge. Some of the conversations I took part in occurred during visits, and at times within the context of semi-structured interviews. As a method, this allowed for

shared participation in the experiences of the stories that were being told. The conversational method gives the participants control over the story they want to share, and therefore aligns with an internal process of receiving the teachings needed. I have drawn on these conversations to emphasize the strength of individuals and community, my own strengths, and to respond to my research objectives.

To provide a better understanding of my process of knowledge-gathering in Moose Factory, I provide a quantitative number of both semi-structured interviews and conversations. This does not trump nor diminish the value of my being present in the community, and the genuine enjoyment of people's company. Furthermore, the quantity does not lessen the communication within the social interactions and non-verbal communications. Twenty-five semi-structured interviews took place with Band Council members, health care professionals, Youth Centre workers, Project George coordinators and workers, Right to Play youth workers, and Elders. The interview format led to a conversational method which I explained above. I have estimated that twenty-six conversations took place, with a broad range of community members who had various functions and roles in the community. Some of these conversations were continuations of interviews, while others resulted from my formation of ongoing relationships during four months between February 2012 and July 2015 in Moose Factory in addition to the conversations that continued at a distance or with my own family, spiritual mentor and Elders.

Meaning Making from Knowledge Gathering

In my academic task of presenting the knowledge gathered in this study, I draw

guidance again from Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars who contextualize Indigenous forms of knowing as central to their research. Kovach (2009) explains that “in many Indigenous communities, individuals with training and experience inductively analyse patterns were the knowledge-keepers and were highly esteemed” (p. 131). These analyses were specific to context, environment and culture. With this in mind, I chose to identify those who participated in this research process as knowledge-keepers, given that *whakotowin* tends to the knowledge that every person or non-person carries within. For me, this speaks to a reciprocal approach to knowledge, meaning that, at its core, knowledge is relational and the sources are based on relationship (Wilson, 2011).

Castellano (2004) further states that the “knowledge valued in Indigenous societies derives from multiple sources, including traditional teachings, empirical observation, and revelation. These categories overlap and interact with one another, but they are useful for examining the contours of Indigenous knowledge” (p. 23). Again, this speaks to how an Indigenous research approach seeks to acknowledge life philosophy that comes from within an intimate process of coming to know (Simpson 2014). For this reason, the process of interpretation considers oral tradition, stories, dreams, language, Elders, visiting, and inward knowing (Castellano, 2004; Anderson, 2011; Ermine, 1995). Participating in Indigenous research involves aspects such as content flexibility, holistic values, sensitivity towards people’s reality, an understanding of the surroundings, respect for different perspectives, and ethical practices.

In my study, I draw on both the Western approach of thematic analysis and Indigenous inquiry in order to meet my research objective. All recorded interviews

were transcribed, in addition to my field research notes, which can also be described as a self-reflexive journal. The aim of thematic analysis is to connect the themes emerging out of the knowledge gathering process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The NVivo coding tool helped to organize my interviews in order to better understand the concepts of *milo pimatisiwin*, learning from the land, personal stories of the land, land-based initiatives, the impact of connecting to the land, Cree life principles, youth wellbeing and the conception of wellbeing, as well as my own field/journal notes. The themes that emerged were broadly categorized based on my research objective. My research chapters were not decided in advance. I applied an approach whereby the experiences of the knowledge keepers and my own experience as a researcher generated more specific knowledge about what a connection to the land meant. This method of analysis, based on Indigenous inquiry, allowed for both individual and collective perspectives on health and wellbeing to emerge.

Personal and collective experiences are not merely data that are collected to extrapolate research findings; these experiences of the land are containers that hold timeless forms of living knowledge and wisdom. According to Castellano (2004), Indigenous knowledge is “personal, oral, experiential, holistic and conveyed in narrative or metaphorical language” (p. 25). Knowledge presented in an Indigenous inquiry methodology must at times stand alone, and requires careful consideration so that the narratives are not fragmented in the process of interpretation or analysis (Kovach, 2009). This can pose a challenge, given that Western academic rigour requires objective and systematic analysis and interpretation. This does not, however, mean that an Indigenous approach to research is not systematic, as Kovach explains. “In

considering story as both method and meaning, it is presented as a culturally nuanced way of knowing” (Kovach, 2009, p. 94).

Academic and Community Ethics

With free and informed consent, some of the interviews and conversations were recorded and transcribed. Some participants preferred that I take hand-written notes, as they were not comfortable with being recorded. Copies of transcriptions were provided when requested. One research participant requested that her interview be excluded from the research study. Chapters that sourced personal communications were provided to participants for review prior to publication. People were given the opportunity to make changes and to validate what I had understood, or not understood. When I was in the community, I met with some of knowledge keepers in person and provided them with hard copies of chapters for review and for further discussion.

For the most part, the names of knowledge keepers have been identified in the research. “From a relations with people perspective, the information imparted, or story offered, would lose its power without the knowledge of the teller; and thus, the reason why the researched do not want to be anonymous” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 119). Kovach (2009) confirms that letting people’s names stand is a form of relational accountability and part of oral cultures. The knowledge keepers were given the opportunity to remove their names from the articles before publication.

I was sensitive to the stories being shared, given their personal and sacred nature. Some narratives were not meant to be included. Intuitively, I knew they were to be respected as ceremony. There are also aspects of my own personal reflections that

were not included. These experiences are still working through me and teaching me. This is part of the self-reflexive and critical process that is required. In addition to ethics from an Indigenous research perspective, ethics from within academia was also respected.

This research was part of a broader research project titled “Building Sustainable Youth Development Sports Programs for First Nation, Metis and Inuit Populations,” which was approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa. The ethics was recently renewed from January 17, 2016 to January 2017 (File No: H10-11-08). The Moose Cree First Nation Band also provided a letter to my supervisor confirming their approval of the research. Both of these formal documents are attached as appendices.

The Omushkego People, Visiting, and Protocols

Indigenous ways of searching for knowledge intersect with our lives as researchers and the communities we work with (Absolon, 2011). Bertha Sutherland, Associate Executive Director, was my main contact in the band office. I received guidance from her in terms of research trips and kept her abreast of research developments, challenges, and other project processes. I also shared and reviewed with her my research outline and research chapters. I checked in with her in terms of the appropriateness of presenting community information at conferences. Draft copies of articles were provided to her for comment and to ensure accuracy.

I also relied on Carmen Chilton, Director of the Youth Centre. She made space for me at the Youth Centre and introduced me to the new staff and her circle of friends. She

helped me find accommodations in the community, and included me in traditional Cree ceremonies. Together, we worked on a community-centred project, Milo Pimatisiwin, and presented the work at the Students for Canada's North conference in April 2015. This led to the co-authorship of a peer-reviewed article on the project, as presented in Chapter Five. It is not uncommon for an Indigenous methodology to include a co-authoring process (Kovach, 2009). The creation of that chapter was an ongoing, cooperative process of years of conversations, over the phone and by email. We systematically reviewed drafts and sought to adhere to both Cree values and the demands of academic rigour. It was important that the chapter accurately represent our collective and individual voices and stories.

I worked with others in the community, such as Darryl Dick (the former Right To Play community mentor), who first invited me to come back to the community to consider a research project that addressed his concerns, as stated earlier. He introduced me to the Youth Centre staff and the Moose Cree First Nation Band staff. He suggested knowledge keepers for me to meet with, and encouraged youths and others to meet with me for interviews, for the purpose of sharing their views on the importance of land-based initiatives for youth.

It quickly became evident that people cared deeply for the youth's wellbeing. This was one of their main priorities. The methodology became one of visiting, either over coffee, over a meal, while driving, or out on the land, was a common approach to sharing and exchanging knowledge. I will elaborate further on the methodology of the way of visiting in Chapter 3. I met people at various community events, such as the Treaty 9 Conference, Gathering of Our Peoples, and the Healing Pathways Conference.

Conversations would often begin with the questions of where I was from and why I was in the community. A first exchange often led to arrangements for a second visit, for a formal or informal interview, or simply for an invitation to come enjoy goose, rabbit, and/or moose at their home.

Charlie Cheechoo, the Project George Coordinator, played a significant role in my research. I spent many days visiting him. Knowledge transmission occurred while running errands, having coffee, or in his office with a recording device. He was generous in providing DVDs, information packages, letters, and photos of Project George. He also ensured that I interviewed his two helpers. He made arrangements for me to attend a Project George trip, to ensure that I got to know the youth and Elders and that I had a lived experience of the land-based initiative. He covered my expenses and made sure that I had the proper outdoor gear. In turn, I supported the continuation of Project George by presenting it at academic conferences, by providing funds through phase one of the Milo Pimatisiwin project, and by offering administrative support when I was in the community. Although I have named only a few key people, there are many others who played a vital role in ensuring my wellbeing and meaningful research with the community.

Community Protocols

Community research protocols are typically governed by a set of values that are determined by the community itself. First Nations OCAP principles (ownership, control, access, and possession) are emphasized when doing research within an Indigenous context. I further emphasized the values of respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and reflective non-judgement (Hart, 2010; Wilson, 2011).

Based on my own knowledge of cultural protocol and “cultural grounding,” I followed specific practices, such as offering gifts and/or tobacco when appropriate (Kovach 2008). Because not all knowledge keepers share the belief that tobacco is a sacred medicine and offering, I always sought to share a gift they may appreciate, such as tea, maple syrup, or books. An honorarium was offered to some participants, when they were working outside of their current employment. The Ontario Public Research Group (OPRIG) provided financial support for the research participants. It was not always possible for me to provide an offering, given the nature of knowledge-sharing in a visiting context, which is unplanned. As well, I sometimes ended up without a recording device or consent form at my fingertips. But I did my best to give back to the community.

Although the research project itself has ended, some of the relationships continue via email, Facebook, phone, and in person, well beyond my field research trips into the community. In the case of some of the people I met, we became part of one another’s kinship relations, sharing with and learning from one another. “Sharing what one learns is an important part of Indigenous tradition. This type of sharing can take the form of a story of personal life experience and is done with a compassionate mind and love for others” (Archibald, 2008, p. 2). Sharing is a form of learning and a value embedded in *milo pimatisiwin*. It remains a strong Métis and Cree cultural value, bringing with it a shared responsibility to make sure our kin have what they need to be well (Archibald, 2008; Anderson, 2011; Kovach, 2009). For this reason, I have included in my concluding chapter the teachings that I have gathered from this study. This is my

way of giving back, which reflects what Indigenous scholars call “integrating the self as methodology” (Absolon, 2011, p. 70).

Concluding Thoughts

Beyond a Colonial Participatory Paradigm

The rethinking of participatory research with Indigenous peoples will most likely continue for decades. I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of these early stages of discussion within the context of this research study. I have come to recognize our voice as Indigenous peoples. It is not something awaiting “inclusion,” nor is it an “other” to be excluded. Rather, the Indigenous voice speaks of participating as equals in life in the ways we know best.

It is evident that participatory ethics must go beyond a normative set of guidelines that help outside researchers politely manoeuvre their way through Indigenous communities. Consulting and including Indigenous voices, images, and knowledge merely as ingredients in the mixing bowl of research findings can undermine the subtleties of local historicity, conditions, and wisdom (Battiste, 2000; Briggs & Sharp, 2004). Challenging power relations comes with scrutiny, not of the other, but of ourselves. Accordingly, the need to reflect cultural subtleties in ethical and scientific thought is paramount to the co-creation of research efforts.

Much of the literature suggests a respect for the wholeness of Indigenous knowledge systems and the wholeness of Indigenous peoples themselves. In my own life, I wondered: “Whoever said we were broken?” It was an instant of self-inquiry that

emerged after a fasting ceremony. Somewhere in my consciousness I had come to believe we were broken as a people, and that I needed to be repaired. The wisdom that emerged out of ceremony revealed otherwise. Accordingly, Alfred's work (2005) calls for the engagement of the wisdom of the traditional knowledge, values, language, and infrastructure of the people themselves. The historical neglect of Indigenous knowledge as connected to communal and personal wellbeing has led to the proliferation of knowledge making in the Western sense.

It would seem that the participatory mode of research is maturing, both intellectually and spiritually. The ebb and flow in the relationships between research and action, researcher and community, and intellect and heart, have the potential to help define the varying boundaries between power relations in research. We simply need to remain open to ways of being with one another and recognizing one another as another, not the other. Perhaps it is the ways our ancestors taught us. There is a growing scholarship that can help us determine how we can redirect participatory research and community development toward a new kind of power—a kind of power that Bishop describes as emerging from a place of “compassionate understanding of one’s moral position” (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008, p. 11). The teaching that “a script does not work where real life is” continues to guide my research journey. The unscripted space I shared with the Omushkego people has strengthened my exploration of the visiting way as a Métis and Cree methodology (Whidden 2006). It has further inspired the co-authorship of an research article whereby participation exemplifies a way in which we can achieve new ways of conceiving power.

Chapter Three: Fostering an Indigenous Research Methodology

Given that the aim of this study is to examine how an Indigenous research methodology helps us to come to know land-based initiatives as *milo pimatisiwin*, this methodological section builds on the efforts of Indigenous scholars who have positioned Indigenous ways of knowing as central to their research methodologies (Absolon, 2011; Dorion, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Simpson, 2011). I will situate this study within research that will help guide me towards making visible an Indigenous research methodology. More specifically, I will employ an Indigenous research methodology grounded in an epistemology of visiting, which I call the Visiting Way—An Indigenous Methodology of Relating.

Methodology defines the way in which a research study is approached and directed. A methodology positioned as Indigenous is intricately related to Indigenous ways of knowing, thinking, relating, and being (Kovach, 2009, 2015). I draw on the work of Indigenous scholars Margaret Kovach, Kathleen Absolon, and Shawn Wilson, as well as Metis and Cree Elders, because of their significant contribution to Indigenous research methodologies and to decolonizing research approaches within the academy. Anishnabek scholar Kathleen Absolon's (2011) research shows how Indigenous scholars are asserting distinct ways of producing knowledge through their research. She uses the term *Kaandossiwin*, which describes how Anishinaabek peoples arrive at knowledge from within culture. Her research demonstrates the varied ways of coming to know for Indigenous researchers, according to their specific tribal worldviews.

Kovach (2005, 2009, 2015) refers to three key themes in Indigenous methodology (grounded in Indigenous epistemology): 1. the relational; 2. the collective; and 3. the methods. I will briefly summarize Indigenous epistemology and these three

themes, as they form the foundation of the visiting way. Within the context of Indigenous methodology, Indigenous epistemology is significant as it “suggests an Indigenous way of functioning in the world” (Kovach, 2005, p. 27). Kovach’s extensive research shows that Indigenous ways of knowing are fluid, experiential, and teachings-centred, with special significance placed on stories and intergenerational transmission. Knowing also comes from intuition, language, dreams and visions, stillness, and “interrelationships with the human world, the spirit world and inanimate entities of the ecosystem” (Kovach, 2005, p. 28). Indigenous knowledge is “born of the necessity to feed, clothe and transmit value.” It is practical and has purpose, with an emphasis on being organic, respectful, and reciprocal, as well as on a sense of humor (Kovach, 2005, p. 28).

The relational aspect of Indigenous methodology “honors the cultural value of relationship, it emphasizes people’s ability to shape and change their own destiny, and it is respectful” (Kovach, 2005, p. 30). The collective aspect involves the recognition that relationships and reciprocity uphold the wellbeing of our kinship relations. Kinship is not limited to human beings; in an Indigenous context, kin extends to spirit life, plant life, animal life, and the cosmos (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). “It is a way of life that creates a sense of belonging, place and home [...] inherent in this way of life is reciprocity and accountability to each other, the community, clans and nations” (Kovach, 2005, p. 30). Wilson (2008) refers to this as “relational accountability.” And as for the third theme, an Indigenous methodology legitimates Indigenous methods. “Because Indigenous ways of knowing are intricately connected to Indigenous ways of doing,” Kovach (2005) proposes, “epistemology, theory, methods and ethical protocols

are integral to Indigenous methodology” (p. 32). Indigenous ways of knowing vary according to cultural traditions, customs, principles, values, and place. For example, these include Buffalo Hunt methodology, Northern Cree Canoe Trip, Gathering Berries in a Northern Context, Bush Cree Storytelling Methodology, Storywork, Wampum Belt Teachings, Medicine Wheel Teachings and Indigenous language, songs, ceremonies, and dreams (Absolon, 2011; Archibald, 2008; Michell, 2012, 2015; Kovach, 2009; Simpson, 2011). Indigenous research methodologies are grounded in a worldview that highlights the importance of relationship, also expressed as “relationality” (Adese, 2014; Wilson, 2008). Wilson (2008) explains that “if Indigenous ways of knowing have to be narrowed through once particular lens (which certainly does not), then surely that lens would be relationality. All things are related and therefore relevant” (p. 58). Along with Kovach’s description of the relational aspect of Indigenous research methodology, this implies that knowledge systems are produced through relation, and therefore through a living, creative, holistic, and organic process.

Engaging in a methodology as a way of life has significant implications. Kovach (2005) points to how the collective aspect of Indigenous research disrupts individualistic approaches to research whereby researchers attempt to predefine questions, participants, and processes. Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith (2008) explain that an indigenous approach “addresses how Indigenous culture and epistemology are sites of empowerment and resistance” (p. 9). Indigenous methodologies aim both to “disrupt homogeneity in research” (Kovach, 2008, p. 12), and as Absolon’s (2011) research shows, to regenerate *milo pimatisiwin* in the lives of our families and communities.

The cyclical act of regenerating involves addressing the ongoing harmful effects of settler-colonialism, building resilience to deficit-based attitudes, and drawing strength on the methodologies and cultural knowledge that already exists in our communities. Another implication relates to what Maria Campbell (2007) poignantly discusses: a return to the consciousness of *whakotowin*. I return to Elder Maria Campbell's teaching because I need to hear it over and over again. Indigenous Elders, scholars, and the Omushkegowuk people offered me a perspective of how Indigenous methods and research methodology can help guide us to a process of coming to know who we are, where we come from, what went wrong, and where we are going (Absolon, 2011; Anderson, 2011; Dorion, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012).

The focus on Indigenous knowledge systems within Indigenous health and wellbeing research is often contextualized as Indigenous resurgence and connection to the land (Absolon, 2011; Simpson, 2014). This resurgence and connection has many facets, including contesting and resisting what Leanne Simpson (2011) refers to as "the cage of the empire" (p. 34). A decolonizing methodological process also places value on revisiting the past, our nations, our homes, and ourselves. For Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), "coming to know the past has been part of critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges" (p. 36). Looking back provides signposts which show us how "to connect to the land and our stories and to live our intelligences no matter how urban or how destroyed our homelands have become" (Simpson, 2014, p. 23).

Recognition of the struggles and fortitude that come from within the colonial cage are a part of the decolonizing process (Corntassel 2012; Laenui, 2000; Kovach, 2009). For me, decolonization means recognizing and knowing my responsibilities to what it means to be Métis as a peoplehood, as a Nation, as *people who own themselves*. From the position of my Spirit name, it involves self-recognition in the face of the earth, and knowing my roles and responsibilities within the diverse social systems I navigate. From the position of a researcher, it means rightfully taking up space in knowledge production, and resisting being consumed by the relentless neurosis of modernity. Within the context of this research study, I draw on a decolonization process that fortifies the resurgence of an Indigenous perspective on health and wellbeing, with an aim to interrupt and to transform colonial concepts that continue to cause harm. I further draw strength from a methodology of relating—the way of visiting—as it is embedded in Kovach’s explanation of the relational, the collective, and methods. As Simpson’s (2014) work highlights,

visiting within Nishnaabeg intelligence means sharing oneself through story, through principled and respectful consensual reciprocity with another living being. Visiting is lateral sharing in the absence of coercion and hierarchy, and in the presence of compassion. Visiting is fun, enjoyable, nurturing of intimate connections and relationship building. Visiting is the core of our political system (leaders visiting with all the members of the community), our mobilization (Tkamse36 and Pontiac visited within and outside of their own nations for several years before they expected mobilization), and our intelligence (people visiting Elders, sharing food, taking care) (p. 18).

The way of visiting is appropriate in the context of this study with Moose Cree First Nation. Visiting is part of the Cree cultural and social world, just as it is part of the Métis

way of life. I will elaborate further in this chapter how the way of visiting reinforces the significance of Indigenous ways of functioning in the world.

Situating myself as part of a Methodology of Relating

With the emergence of Indigenous scholarship, Indigenous people are no longer required to leave themselves, their communities, and their culture out of their research. Given the objective of this study, I will elaborate on my experience with and interpretation of the three key themes in Indigenous research methodology, and more specifically, the Visiting Way as a methodology of relating. I begin by first situating myself, and building on the concepts of relationality and decolonization within Indigenous health research. For me, situating myself is a way of revisiting place, belonging, relations, and of remembering why this work is important. Through this process, the qualities embedded in the Visiting Way emerge, and this informs the way that Indigenous research methods and methodology guide this research study. “As a reflexivity method of research, situating the self authorizes the expression of the relevant narrative from personal experiences, those reminiscences of life rooted in our earliest experience that shape our understanding of the world” (Kovach, 2008, p. 112). Situating myself helps to formulate my understanding of the Visiting Way—a Methodology of Relating, which guides this study. By doing this, I reclaim the cultural practice of visiting as a Cree and Métis way of being and doing, and as a way of coming to know the values embedded in *milo pimatisiwin*.

In situating myself, I also position myself in terms of my relationships to place, family, history, and identity. I reflect on who I am, where I come from, and what

compels me to pursue the life-affirming teachings that foster *milo pimatisiwin* in our homes and community. This process relates to Kovach's (2009) awareness that "seeking insights into Indigenous forms of inquiry cause me to revisit my identity, to retrieve my story from the archive of my being" (p. 5). "Self-locating," as it is termed by Kovach, is a common Indigenous approach to research. In doing so, one resists being categorized by the other and devalued by oneself. This approach nudges the boundaries of privilege and the discomforts of vulnerability, including my own. Maria Campbell, Métis Elder, has consistently directed me throughout this research study to seek stories from home—to go home. That I would know who I am and where I am from was expected of me by my relatives and the Moose Cree community. As Indigenous communities increasingly take control of research, self-knowing—"a value contained within *milo pimatisiwin*"—is increasingly expected as part of engaged scholarship that resists the objectification of both the researcher and research participants (Grouse, 2014).

This process I have undertaken, of learning how an Indigenous research methodology can help us to come to know land-based initiatives as *milo pimatisiwin*, takes me back home, to Métis Elders, to stories, to extended kin in Moose Factory, to the past, and to a methodology of relating. With the Omushkego people's focus on wellbeing and connection to the land, I challenge myself to examine my own understanding of *milo pimatisiwin*. This process towards relational accountability, which, as Maria Campbell explains, is embedded in the worldview of *whakotowin*. Respect, reciprocity, and relationality are at the heart of this work. This is a process of

learning and unlearning, of critical self-reflexivity. As Kovach (2009) gently reminds novice researchers when choosing an Indigenous research methodology, “start where you are, it will take you where you need to go” (p. 10).

Belonging to a name, people, and history

The legal name given to me at birth is Janice Cindy Gaudet. I was born during the planting season, the season of new growth and new life. My spirit name is Kamewnakochiket. In the Willow Cree dialect, it means the One Who Creates in Beauty. I received this name in my late thirties during a tent shaking ceremony with the Willow Cree people from the One Arrow First Nation Cree community, two kilometres from our family farm. The tent shaking ceremony is an ancient Cree method of communicating with the spirit world. I was told by the late Medicine man and dear friend, Jerry Prosper, that my name came from the cosmology of the thunder beings. I continue to draw guidance, teachings, and strength from my spirit name. It is a relationship that is continuous. I am grateful for this name and for the people who remember the ways of coming to know ourselves and our responsibility to *whakotowin*. And just as important, I give thanks for the Willow Cree people’s willingness to share this knowledge, and for adopting some members of our family as extended kin.

I come from my mother, Norma Morrison, her mother, Auxille Lepine, her mother, Margaret Boucher, and her mother, Caroline Lesperance. They are a strong lineage of Métis women that come from the Red River Settlement in Manitoba and St. Louis-Hoey, Saskatchewan. It was in my adult years that I learned that my mother’s grandparents were influential leaders in the 1885 Métis resistance in Batoche.

Neil McLeod (2007), a Nêhiyawak (Plains Cree) scholar, describes the events of 1885 as the Métis and Cree peoples' attempt to resist the colonial presence, noting that "out of desperation, frustration with the government, and starvation, events culminated in armed conflicts" (p. 57). Following the 1885 conflict, the marginalization and hostile treatment of Métis and Cree people intensified. Race relations and engagement or non-engagement in the conflict became a determining factor in treatment of Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan. The Métis—key players in the economic development of Western Canada—had "no real place except insofar as they obstructed the process of expansion of European civilization" (Francis, 1997, p. 72). The "halfbreeds," often referred to as Métis, threatened the British mindset, and were considered a humiliation for the British nation (Perry 2001). The dominant British society defined the hybrid race (*métis*) as separate from mainstream society. The offspring were, as Adele Perry (2001) puts it, "a telling indictment of the colonial project writ large" (p. 12). My grandmothers would not have accepted these deceptions. Their own stories remain because of who they are.

My father, Sylvio, is Acadian. His father comes from a predominantly Acadian and Micmac community in St. Jacques d'Achigan, Québec. His mother, Valeda Dupuis, came from a well-established entrepreneurial family in Joliette, Québec. The two families pioneered westward and settled in a predominantly French farming community in the early 1900s, during a time when the government was expanding its reach into Western Canada. The state was offering land for agricultural purposes to the settler society for next to nothing. It was an offering that granted settler privilege. The

conditions of acquiring land for \$10 a homestead were to farm and to cultivate the land yearly. My great-grandparents travelled from Québec by train and settled on a homestead near the former village of Bellevue, Saskatchewan, where my father and his nine siblings were born and raised. There, my father attended school in a one-room class for grades 1 to 4, and then in another one-room class for grades 5 to 9. In school, he was taught by one of his eight sisters, Carmen Boucher, and by other lay educators from the area. My father speaks proudly of his responsibility as a young boy for tending to the wood furnaces that heated the classrooms and the home. As a boy, he was taught by his uncle to snare rabbits, and he later learned how to be a farmer in order to provide for his family. His mother hauled water from the North Saskatchewan river. (Later, when I was growing up, the water was hauled from the village well as it remains today for many families.) My father explains that they wanted for nothing. They had land to farm, food from the garden, livestock, a warm home, and neighbours who helped one another. It was “just how it was,” he says repeatedly.

In many ways, this is still how life in an agricultural context in Saskatchewan continues. What also remains are the deficit views of Métis and Cree people among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Mixed economies, violence, health and economic disparities, and gender discrimination continue to hamper our ability to recognize the richness of the Métis and Cree peoples’ perspective on what it means to be well, and to see the pervasiveness of “the shape-shifting colonial entities” (Corntassel, 2012, p. 91). Settler-colonialism is well-entrenched and rarely discussed publicly. Through this process of exploring the Indigenous perspective on health and

wellbeing, my commitment to awaken a just future, beginning in our own homes, has manifested itself. My strong desire to promote wellbeing has encouraged me to pursue the tenets of decolonialization.

Both of my parents' families have important narratives and epistemic differences in terms of ways of being in relation to the land - both live within me as a researcher. My research evoked the desire to learn more about—to hear their stories, the untold stories and to better understand how they uniquely conceived of their connection to the land within an agricultural and racialized context. My family's homestead, which is where I grew up, was eight miles from Batoche, two miles from the One Arrow Cree First Nation community, and three miles from the Bellevue that I knew. In 1926, the original village of Bellevue was relocated in response to an expanding settler society and Catholic Missionary presence. I was raised with a farming lifestyle under the big prairie skies. I am the youngest of five siblings. Today, I am auntie to 37 nephews and nieces, and a kokum to my husband's three grandchildren. In reflecting on Maria Campbell's explanation of culture, I am inspired in my efforts to help bring forth an Indigenous research methodology. I draw strength from the culture I have experienced, as I seek to highlight Indigenous conceptions of health and wellbeing. I also seek to draw attention to visiting as a way of coming to know *whakotowin*, and to foster *milo pimatisiwin* through our research practices as well as in our families and communities. Our families and communities are a part of the process of reclaiming, a fact hinted at by those who have suggested that a part of an Indigenous research methodology is going home (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009). To aid me in my search for

clarity about what constitutes Indigenous theory, Maria Campbell urged me to do precisely this—go home. “Theory comes from the way you lived. It is inside of you. Go home, visit your relatives, visit the land,” she said (personal communication, Maria Campbell, June 2013).

My search for a connection with the land is ultimately tied to my personhood and peoplehood, which takes this methodology beyond the forces of opposites, such as objectivity and subjectivity. It is for this reason that Indigenous scholars see the “self as woven through the process,” a process that values teachings learned through a balance of intellect and emotions (Absolon, 2011, p. 70). Sharing the teachings of my own experience through this study becomes a part of my relational accountability to myself, to my family, and to the people who were part of this research.

Indigenous peoples most often want to know who you are and where you come from (Martin, 2007). Introducing myself is the starting point for an engagement with myself, my community, and the people of Moose Factory. It also reveals who I am not and where I am not from. I represent my experiences in the context of my relationship with family, land, and identity, and with the Moose Cree First Nation people. This relationship is not static, nor is my role as a researcher. I do not speak on behalf of all Métis and Cree peoples, nor do I speak on behalf of my family or my community.

Questions like “Where are you from?” and “Who are your relatives?” are typical when Indigenous people meet one another for the first time. I have heard, and I still hear, my mother pose these questions when she meets new people. The question “What

do you do?" is rarely a part of this first exchange. What I do and what I know are not who I am. When looking back on how we lived and how we treated and related with one another, I am compelled to revisit my mother's garden. The garden was and remains at the centre of our food source and lifeline. My mother grew large vegetable gardens, as did her mother. How did Mom know to plant tomato seeds on a particular day? One day, I found her words humming inside me: "Aujourd'hui c'est la fête de Saint-Joseph, la journée qu'on plante nos tomates." [Today is the feast of Saint-Joseph, the day we plant our tomatoes.] Weeks passed, then I called her and asked, "How do you know this?" She responded, "C'est ça que maman disait." [This is what Mom would say.] Our brief exchange percolated memories. A month later, my inquiry continued: "How did Memere [grandmother] know this?" "She probably learned it from her mom. Ça faisait des grands jardins dans ce temps-là. [They made big gardens back then.] I would help her; that's all I can say. I am not sure if it was right or wrong. That's how we did it back then," she replied. I too had been schooled in my mother's garden. It was the quiet space—outside the tensions of the house—where I was able to spend much time with my family, and where great learning took place.

They did not have books or the Internet to instruct them on when and how to grow their gardens. Yet their gardens, tended by hands and prayers, fed their large families throughout the year. The ways of growing a garden were lived, tested, and shared orally for generations. The energy that these gardens provided offered long-lasting nourishment. The process of gardening had many stages and is often described as hard work: preparing the land, planting the seeds, tending to the seeds' various

needs, and supporting their growth by weeding, watering, and visiting the garden on a daily basis. Harvesting led to the first feasts of fresh vegetables, then to the arduous process of preserving and canning food for the months to come. This was done together as a family; we each had a role and responsibility in the process. Learning was done by doing, and observing. There were few instructions provided, but they were enough to remember the significance of this way of life and way of learning.

We also had roles and responsibilities related to the diverse aspects of farm life. Again, I recall that regardless of age, there were chores that required all of our efforts. There were seasonal rituals of gathering food outside the farm, among the Saskatoon and chokecherry bushes. With cords of bail, my mother would wrap pails around our waists. We would spend days picking berries during the ripe berry season. The berries were sweet treats that were preserved and enjoyed throughout the year. This process involved sorting, organizing, and preparation so that they could be packaged in another form—much like the process of doing research. Both my parents upheld the value of not wasting, of using what we had before buying anything new. Trips to (what felt like) the big city, Prince Albert, were infrequent—only when there was something specific we needed. The idea of overconsumption was foreign to me then.

Bellevue, the nearby hamlet where my siblings and I went to school, was predominantly French and centred around the values of the Catholic Church. Our schooling was in a conventional setting, mainly taught and led by the religious congregation, Sisters of the Presentation of Mary. I would travel to school by bus. This was different from my mother's experience—travelling by foot, by horseback, or by

pony and sled to Argon country school in Hoey, one kilometre from her family's homestead. She later attended the Sion convent in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan for grades 6 to 9. It was 60 miles away from home. Sometimes she would be away from her family for months at time. Visits to the convent by her family were infrequent because of the distance, their limited capacity for travel, and farm and family life demands. Both of my parents had to leave their formal schooling at grade 9 to help take care of and provide for large families of 10 children. This was not an uncommon practice. Yet I see them as well-educated because they are self-reliant, skilled knowers and survivors of their environment, prosperous growers of crops and gardens that supported their families, and unwavering in their belief system and sense of humour.

Growing up, we were instructed in Catholic beliefs—this is not unfamiliar to Métis people (Adese, 2014). A yearly ritual involved going to the well-known shrine of St. Laurent in July. This was one of the times for gathering with relatives, and so this ritual was an outward expression of our kinship system. The shrine was predominantly attended by people in the surrounding areas. Andy Boyer, a Métis Elder, relative and friend from Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, explained to me how the Métis camp sites were distinct. Non-Indigenous people would set up camp individually, eat in their cars, and then come in to the church for services and leave. “The Métis people,” however, “would settle themselves, make a fire.” Everyone knew which was their camping spot, though none of them had distinct markings. For days on end, they would move in and out of one another's camp sites. Visiting and sharing food, berry picking, stories, songs, brandy and laughter were at the heart of these gatherings. People would often forego

church services. Visiting was just as important, if not more so. This was part of the everyday expression of Métis spirituality; it was a way of being and relating to one another that was not restrictive, that was unscripted yet responsive to the environment and to the needs of the present moment. At the same time, more conventional kinds of prayer also had a place of importance at the individual and community level. Both prayer and visiting affirmed people's connection to the Mother Mary and to their family relations.

Our family would set up camp and spend up to a week there. This time was reserved for visiting with uncles, aunts, and cousins. My favorite excursion was going to the buffalo pit. Little did I know that at that time, the Métis people's wellbeing was very reliant on the spirit of the buffalo (Adese, 2014). Adese's research into Métis modes of living contests the narrative that equates the extinction of the buffalo "with the disappearance of Métis traditional ways of knowing" (p. 57). She argues that "Métis women helped to ensure ways of knowing remained vibrant, and responsive to new ecological contexts [that] allowed Métis peoples, as peoples, to survive" (p. 58). The St. Laurent shrine remains a strong spiritual place-holder for the Métis and Cree people in the area. Back to Batoche, a yearly gathering of Métis on the historic land where the 1885 Northwest Resistance occurred is another occasion where people journey from long distances to practice the visiting way.

As children, we accompanied our parents to all social events. Children were welcome, and we found ways to entertain ourselves—typically, playing outside and creating games with what we had. These social events included home gatherings, which

typically involved playing cards, singing, with Mom leading and playing the piano, dancing, food, and alcohol. It was very common for families in the area to gather at one another's homes. Our gatherings typically involved people from the Bellevue community. Once a month, the women would get together and do each other's hair while the men worked outside. Women would also come together to help tend each other's gardens when one of the mothers was away, usually in the hospital to give birth. These visits were times for sharing our struggles and gossiping about what was happening in the community. In my mind, the people that we visited with were all our relatives.

In my early twenties, I left the family homestead to go live in the city of Saskatoon. It was during an encounter with a colleague that I began to question my identity. She asked me if I was native. Perplexed by her question, I stepped back and firmly stated that I was not. Her question literally led me back home, to my mother, and eventually to my master's research, in which I examined my Métis identity through four generations of women in my own family, and looked at how we can heal and live beyond the wounds of the 1885 Northwest Metis Resistance (Gaudet, 2009).

One aspect of my master's research was about visiting. More specifically, the question I asked my mother was why we rarely visited our Métis relatives who lived nearby. She explained that growing up, her father—who actually had a Métis mother and grandmother—did not allow them to interact with my grandmother's Métis family. He had adopted a deficit view of who Métis people are. And she [my mother] further added, that visiting met travelling long distances. I suspect that the visiting way would

likely disrupt his authoritarian position within the family, and possibly expose his violent outbursts toward my grandmother. There's something important to be said about living in a racialized, gendered body in the midst of dominant forces reinforcing gendered and racial normativity. *Whakotowin* too would be and was disrupted with the establishment of normative ways of thinking about social hierarchies, Indigenous women and inequities. The church and men who held positions of power defined the sense of belonging and wellbeing. The value of diversity, solidarity and critical examination of dominant approaches was silenced. It felt like we became strangers to ourselves, to one another and to the land. When I discussed the importance of visiting with Karen Pine-Cheechoo from Moose Factory, she explained that it is women's way of being. This is consistent with Maria Campbell's life stage teaching that women's role was to keep *whakotowin* together. Visiting and caring for one another as women upheld respect and equity among themselves (Anderson, 2011). I have come to understand visiting as a euphemism for circle work, a method of governing respectful community relations and protecting the social fabric of Indigenous societies (Gaudet & Caron, 2014). The influence of settler-colonialism negated women's position of authority within family governance systems (Simpson, 2014). As Kim Anderson (2008) points out, this further encouraged "crossing over a boundary," a physical boundary that became a real danger for women, and as a result, for the health and wellbeing of the family. Simpson (2014) makes known that a strong web of kinship relations and Indigenous presence disrupts the tenacity of settler-colonialism.

The Visiting Way – The core of my Indigenous Research Methodology

I began the formulation of a research methodology that felt distant from my mother's garden and Moose Cree First Nation. This initial formulation came from inside the four white walls of my academic office, and involved a feeling of disconnection from Indigenous research methodologies. As discussed in Chapter two, my first visit to Moose Factory led me to re-examine research methodology from an Indigenous perspective, and more specifically, from the Métis and Cree worldview of relationality.

When I attempted to gather knowledge in the "proper" academic way, I was corrected by the community. It became obvious to me that I was uncomfortable because I was attempting to do research outside of myself. I had not even realized that while I was doing my field research, the O mushkegowuk people were showing me a more practical approach to research: visiting. Allen Sailors, a Cree knowledge keeper, demonstrated how hospitality—a characteristic of visiting—welcomed my whole self to be present in his home and with his family. He explained that this included sharing emotions, knowledge, ideas, and food from the land. It was important for him to respect the visitor, and for the visitor to reciprocate, in this space of sharing and being together. To me, this is a form of relationality, of participating in one another's lives. There is no word for *relating*, so I draw on the way of visiting to convey an Indigenous methodological inquiry that is embedded in a process. The way of visiting draws attention to visibility, empathy, and as Kovach (2009) attests as Indigenous research methodology places as much, "if not more attention on process than on product or outcome" (p. 66). An Indigenous research methodology grounded in visiting thus contributes to a holistic understanding of research. Holism is about learning from all

our connections. In the subsections that follow, I will examine what I have come to understand as the integral parts of the visiting way, and will explore how it can help shed light on *milo pimatisiwin* and land-based initiatives.

Visiting as a value

In Indigenous societies, visiting is perceived as a value (Simpson, 2014). In this context, value as in a principle that guide one's life. It is a value that guides the way we conduct ourselves and the ways in which we relate to one another and to the act of coming together. For Indigenous peoples, visiting creates and fortifies connections that unify and build community from the ground up. It is where humour, ideas, silence, news, concerns, pain, knowledge, and arguments are disseminated at a grassroots/ground level. It is political, re-centring authority in a kind of relating that is itself rooted in a cultural, spiritual, and social context. "Like governance, leadership, and every other aspect of reciprocated life, education comes from the roots up" (Simpson, 2014, p. 9). Visiting is a way of life that is unscripted and yet purposeful.

The visiting way points to ritual spaces where connections are strengthened, where stories are heard, where remembering occurs, and where we are reminded of who we are and of our roles and responsibility for the wellbeing of the whole (Anderson, 2011; Simpson, 2014). It addresses a gap in community-based and participatory research methodology. "Visit" comes from the old French term "visiter," meaning to "come to (a person) to comfort or benefit" (www.dictionary.reference.com). The Indigenous practice of visiting goes beyond utilitarian function. Visiting, as I discovered through this study, is a methodology of relating, a form of celebrating life, and a living expression of *whakotowin*.

My mother, grandmother, and aunties taught me at an early age the ethics and protocols of visiting as a foundation for remaining connected. Visiting considers receptivity toward and treatment of one another, whether relations, strangers, or non-human entities. This generous way of being was most often expressed and taught by the women responsible for the governance of the household. I observed on many occasions how my mom would make a person feel at ease, how she would serve food, welcome, and accept, so as to offer whatever was needed. There was no formula, nor should there be. She was guided by intuition, responsibility, and values. Andy Boyer described how the first day of the new year was a visiting occasion. His mother would prepare large quantities of simple, typical Métis dishes: “boulettes,” fried “barrières,” corn, and potatoes. People from the community would come in and out of the household all day. His mother greeted every person at the door with an embrace. He recalls that she treated everyone the same manner. And a dear friend from the Matagami region in Treaty 9 territory explained the way of visiting as an acknowledgement of one’s spirit. It is a way of coming to know one’s spirit, and fostering a consciousness of reciprocity.

Visiting as self-recognition

Visiting as self-recognition affirms the reality of our struggle and our inherent connection to the land. Simpson refers to this as self-recognition that comes from the struggle of Indigenous-settler relations and from one’s connection to the land.

Recognition for us is about presence, about profound listening and about recognizing and affirming the light in each other, as a mechanism for nurturing and strengthening relationships to our Nishnaabeg worlds. It is a core part of our political systems because they are rooted in our bodies and our bodies are not just informed by but created and maintained by complex coded networked relationships of deep reciprocity (Simpson, 2015).

The Cree and Métis in Moose Cree territory have a visiting way similar to and yet distinct from the visiting I grew up with in an agricultural context. The exchange of knowledge, the social interactions, and the way of visiting continue to be practiced in our respective communities. These have persisted over generations. The way of visiting ensures that we relate to the land as an extension of ourselves. Visiting keeps us connected to our relatives, to the community, and to the land. It was a methodology of being well and taking care of one another. I also see the way of visiting as a form of “Indigenous internal self-recognition that comes from a core place-based practice” (Simpson, 2015, NAISA presentation paper). Such an understanding of self-recognition subverts the need to be validated and legitimized within a “settler-privilege milieu” (Simpson, 2015, NAISA presentation paper). It solicits a reciprocal obligation, a responsibility to the wellbeing to our human relations. And this lived expression of reciprocity goes beyond human relationships. It is also, as Simpson and many Indigenous people attest, about being recognized in the cosmology of songs, spirit, moon, stars, stories, dreams, ancestors, and the plants and animals of one’s territory.

Indigenous internal self-recognition is a core building block of resurgent struggle because it is the mechanism through which we reproduce and amplify Indigeneity. When another Native person recognizes and reflects back to me my Nishnaabe essence, when we interact with each other in an Nishnaabeg way, my Indigeneity deepens. When my Indigeneity grows I fall more in love with my homeland, my family, my culture, my language, more in line with the idea that resurgence is my original instruction, more in line with the thousands of stories that demonstrate how to live a meaningful life and I have more emotional capital to fight and protect what is meaningful to me (Simpson, 2015).

With my understanding of visiting as a process of self-recognition, I create from within a space to be still, to be receptive. Out of this stillness, I am able to retrieve and embody

an irrefutable knowledge that internal self-recognition is not a duty; it is a skill and an understanding that we are ambassadors of *milo pimatisiwin*. It is this driving force that moves me to study and to renew the Indigenous worldview of visiting. When I visit the cedar tree, the rocks, and the waters where tobacco has been offered by an Elder to support me on this journey, I come to recognize my responsibility to care for that which cares for me. This journey is part of the reciprocity teachings embedded in the visiting way.

Meeting with Elders and going home have helped me to reflect critically on the production of knowledge and the importance of reconnecting, with my two feet on the ground and humility in hand. What new seeds of knowledge are yearning to be planted, in whose garden, and for what purpose? Who will harvest the knowledge? Our own commitment and self-inquiry will help us to respond to these questions. This is a self-reflexive practice that requires what Bhadha calls “a slowing down, of even coming to a standstill” (Bhadha, 1992, pp. 56–57). In the standstill, he argues, an unearthing occurs, as histories are uncovered and space is created for the production of new knowledge. New soil is turned, and we can reimagine creative and loving ways to foster *milo pimatisiwin* in our families for generations.

Visiting as a social purpose

The way of visiting is practical and purposeful. It is a way to discover what was left behind and what needs to be picked up again and reclaimed as our own. Visiting, similar to the Indigenous story methodology, “reveals a set of relationships comprising strong social purpose” (Kovach, 2009, p. 95). The social purpose of visiting is to

maintain a way of governing relations in a manner that do not blur the ethical roles and responsibilities embedded in life stage practices. In this context, governance was established with distinct roles and responsibilities based on life stages from birth to death (Anderson, 2011). Each life stage played a vital social role, providing a sense of belonging and a sense of accountability to the wellbeing of one's kin.

Social relations informed the customary ways in which Indigenous people related to one another. Within an Indigenous context, it is common to refer to one another by way of kinship relations—acknowledging one another as family, such as auntie, sister, mother or grandmother—whether or not two people are blood-related. This is an expression of the relational worldview that aims to render visible to the community the value of one's individual quest for self-knowledge. Responsibilities changed based on different life cycles. Anderson's (2011) research examines how, "the changing roles and responsibilities throughout the life cycle of girls and women shape their identity and their place in Indigenous society" (p. 6). The organization of Indigenous societies, linked to interdependency, served "to uphold the spiritual, social, economic, and political order" (Anderson, 2011, p. 7). The way of visiting provided the foundation upon which individual and collective identity formation structured social relations. As Anderson's research indicates, in visiting, "we learned how to relate to one another" (2011, p. 113). The recovery of the visiting way embedded in the context of an Indigenous worldview, cultural regeneration and decolonization thereby involves collective dreaming, commitment and action. The process of restructuring social

relations in our contemporary societies engages us at an individual level and collective thinking (Anderson 2011).

Mary Black-Rodgers, (2001) a cultural anthropologist and ethnographer, provides insights into visiting as a social purpose. Her research brought her to the Northern Ojibwa and Swampy Cree people west of Hudson Bay. She speaks of having unknowingly been adopted or integrated into Meme, an Indigenous women's kinship group. Exploring the concepts of adoption and fostering within kinship networks, Black-Rodgers finds that there is little distinction between the two for the Oji-Cree and Cree people. Both adoption and fostering involve a commitment to care for one another as though the familial relationship was real. As part of this commitment, fostering and adoption as related to kinship considered marital unions, hunting territories, management of household and a just distribution of economics. Her adoption into Meme and her relationship to the people of Round Lake influenced her study, despite her attempts to remain unbiased in her research. "Each visit brought more closeness and knowledge" (p. 104).

Visiting as protecting the social fabric

Kim Anderson's (2000) research on reconstructing Native womanhood describes how visiting, an integral practice for land-based societies, protected the fabric of community wellbeing. For example, female Elders were largely responsible for ensuring that the members of their family were "grounded in their connections to kin, including ancestral kin" (Anderson, 2011, p. 141). "In a kin-based society, holding the role as the unifier of the family was significant in terms of governance and community

health." (p. 139). The act of visiting and acknowledging one's kin, whether alive or in the spirit world, was one of the ways governance and community health were maintained. Visiting protected the social fabric as it involved social activities that were essential to maintaining a sense of belonging to community. Socializing was integrated in both work, such as berry picking, beading, gardening, fishing and playing games (Anderson 2011). Individually and collectively women could keep a watchful eye on what was going on within the community, talk to one another, and respond to the relevant needs. Anderson (2011) provides an example in relation to the distribution of food and planning and management of food. Women were mainly responsible for food security in the families and community. The hard work of food preparation, canning and preservation occurred collectively in a visiting way.

Visiting was also a way to preserve oral tradition through storytelling. The Cree notions of story is distinguished by *âtalôhkân* which includes the category of sacred legends, unitary episodes (Creation stories), heroic stories (Weesakechank), and moral tales told for the instructive purposes (Cree Legends and Narratives 1995). While *tipâcimôwina* constitutes stories of personal experiences, events, historical narratives and reminiscences (Cree Legends and Narratives 1995). Both types of discourses accompanied each stage of one's life, which related to one's roles and responsibilities within the community. Life stage rituals, such as fasting, moon lodge practices, and questing, incorporated visiting as a way of accompanying the individual in their learning processes (Anderson, 2011).

Simpson (2014) shares a helpful moral story about a young girl, Kwezen. The story exemplifies visiting as embedded in an Indigenous worldview which considers values, roles, reciprocity, relationality, love and responsibility. She describes Kwezen's first to visit the maple tree, Ninnatigoog, where Kwezen discovers the core values of "love, compassion and understanding" (p. 6). Her visit is nested within what Simpson refers to as "Nishnaabeg intelligence." Excited by her discovery, Kwezen "takes her Elders to the tree already trusting that she will be believed, that her knowledge and discovery will be cherished, and that she will be heard" (p. 7). This reflection on Kwezen evokes Simpson's childhood memory of a sugar bush experience, which occurred in the context of a Western learning model. The contrasts with Kwezen's way of learning are overt. Simpson (2014) emphasizes that Kwezen "comes to know maple sugar in the context of love" (p. 7). The relational context influences Kwezen's construction of meaning in her own life. Simpson compels us to think about the significance of where one seeks recognition, meaning, wisdom, and pleasure. Further, she challenges her readers to critically intervene in the overt manner in which settler-colonialism impedes, exploits, and imposes itself upon the dynamic web of Indigenous relationality (Simpson, 2014).

Stories most often transmitting in the way of visiting serve to navigate and reimagine the past, present, and future. Stories are road maps, telling us where we have been, where we want to go, what is needed, and what is no longer needed (Archibald, 2008). To build on this idea of the power of story, I continue to draw on Leanne Simpson's (2014) understanding of the vital function of story for community wellbeing.

Story, she explains, grows consciousness and knowing from the “ground up.” Stories are a form of epistemology, transmitted during times of visiting as a way of relating to one another, and of relaying knowledge and teachings that are experiential and transpersonal.

Younger citizens might further understand just the literal meaning. As they grow, they can put together the conceptual meaning, and with more experience with our knowledge systems, the metaphorical meaning. Then they start to apply the processes and practices of the story in their own lives (when I have a problem, I’ll call my aunts or my grandparents), and “meaning-making becomes an inside phenomenon.” After they live each stage through the story, then they can communicate their lived wisdom, understood through six or seven decades of lived experience and shifting meaning. This is how our old people teach. They are the geniuses because they know wisdom is generated from the ground up, that meaning is for everyone, and that we’re all better when we’re able to derive meaning out of our lives and be our best selves” (Simpson, 2014, pp. 7–8).

Storytelling is at its core decolonizing, because it is a process of remembering, visioning and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both Nishnaabeg and peoples. Storytelling then becomes a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism, where we can create models and mirrors where none existed, and where we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice. Storytelling becomes a space where we can escape the gaze and the cage of the Empire, even if it just for a few minutes (Simpson, 2011, pp. 33–34).

The oral transmission of stories regenerates life force from the physical embodiment of our roots to our intellect, weaving the social fabric of our lives to harmonize with our sense of belonging to kinship relations. It is a reciprocal process embedded in the understanding of one’s connection to the land. Stories move us from conceptual to metaphorical understanding, from knowledge to wisdom, from theory to practice, and from imagination to action. Kovach (2010) tells of how “stories of resistance inspire generations about the strength of the culture” (p. 108).

Stories have storytellers. It is vital in research methodology to ensure that the storyteller and the story are respected and cared for. Stories are spiritual gifts. In many ways, the Omushkego people I met in Moose Factory are the storytellers of this study. How these stories are interpreted and applied will differ from listener to listener, given that they “serve various functions within a community” (Aldern & Good, 2014, p. 28). Stories are not told so that Western knowledge systems may integrate or assimilate them, but rather so that their strength may be applied to the task of living. The way of visiting has made me aware of how stories embed the *milo pimatisiwin* teachings.

Visiting as a living tradition

The way of visiting as a living tradition involves the continuity of the past in the present and the future. As Kim Anderson (2000) reminds us, “what is distinctly Indigenous is the way in which past, present and future are understood as inextricably connected” (p. 15). Many Elders have known this, which is one of the main reasons they have such insight into the spiritual and practical Indigenous knowledge of living and being well. The spirit of knowing begins at an early age and therefore knowledge transmission began as early as in the womb (Anderson, 2011; Dorion, 2010). For some, the connection to the land has been deeply ruptured by Indian residential schools, but there are many Elders who are working with Indigenous scholars to help us learn from within—through self-knowing and through the past—as a means to build healthy lives for our families and communities (Adelson, 2008; Anderson, 2000, 2011; Battiste, 2005; Dorion, 2010; Hart, 2010).

If Indigenous research is to be based on Indigenous ways of knowing, Elders must play a central role (Absolon, 2011). They possess the knowledge, teachings, and stories that will help to re-educate our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits (Archibald, 2008). They are our guides.

In [our] quest to help [our] people, Indigenous scholars and professionals turned to ancient knowledge and teachings to restore control over Indigenous development and capacity building. They sought answers within the rich treasure that has played such an important role in building their unity and dignity: the neglected knowledge and teachings of the Elders (Battiste, 2013, p. 2).

The reliance on Elders has been a significant part of my approach to research. In the paragraphs that follow, I will examine the work of two Métis and Cree women, sisters, and colleagues who are connected to the region of Saskatchewan. They have worked with similar teachings and with Elders from this region. I also seek to contribute to the body of knowledge derived from Métis and Cree thought in Saskatchewan.

Leah Dorion, a Métis woman and educator from Saskatchewan, seeks in her research to understand the role of grandmothers in child rearing practices. As storytelling was used to transmit cultural knowledge, her theoretical lens emphasizes what she refers to as “living traditional cultural teachings” (Dorion, 2010, p. 2). Cree and Métis Elders, and her aunties, played a central role in her research, sharing their respective understandings of child rearing. The historical kinship between the Métis and the Cree is central to the sociocultural context of her study. Dorion (2010) explains that cultural knowledge is often transmitted through the cultural context of prayer and ceremony so asking Elders about the spiritual foundation of *Opikinawasowin* as an important aspect learning how to grow children. In addition, she acknowledges that

some aspects of current Cree and Métis child rearing practices have deviated from Cree and Métis cultural ways and values, and need to be decolonized.

Kim Anderson, a Cree-Métis scholar, explains how oral history can contribute to the processes of decolonization, healing, and the rebuilding of healthy communities. She sought to understand the life cycles of women based on the oral history shared by Elders. Another of her objectives is to contribute to an understanding of how this traditional knowledge can be applied in the reclamation of the good life (Anderson, 2011). Like Dorion, Anderson positions herself within a prevalent Indigenous epistemology by honouring Elders and inviting them to learn from, and to share in, her research study. As with Dorion, the Elders are invited to participate as storytellers and oral historians. Telling stories was a method for transmitting knowledge of the land. These stories contribute to what Anderson refers to as life stage theory. The distinct cultural lens of each unique Elder in Anderson's research points to Indigenous teachings related to her research theme of native women's life stages, affirming that life stage sequences were intrinsically connected to ways of being in relationship to the land.

Dorion (2010) and Anderson (2011) discuss the application of their research to their everyday lives not only as researchers, but also as aunties, mothers, sisters, and grandmothers. They each speak of their intimate relationship to the teachings. Teachings are considered instructions on how to live well, how to be a good human being, and how to have a good mind. Teachings come with responsibility to the community. As a result, teachings are often a central part of everyday life. Scholars will often speak of their individual and collective responsibilities, inspired by the Elders

that are part of their research. Dorion (2010) says, “The Elders emphasize that I have an ethical responsibility to share this knowledge with the Cree and Métis community in as many forms as possible so people can benefit from the basic teachings” (p. 11). Anderson mentions that she was encouraged to share and to teach her research on women’s life stages. These and other scholars further explain how specific cultural protocols inform their theoretical framework and methodology (Anderson, 2011; Dorion, 2010; Kovach, 2009).

I have been fortunate to be accompanied by Elders committed to restoring *milo pimatisiwin*, both in the context of my research and in my own life. For this research study, I relied once again on Maria Campbell, a Métis Cree Elder and educator from Batoche, Saskatchewan. She has helped me, and continues to help me, in countless ways throughout my academic and personal life. In 2012, I presented Maria with tobacco and a gift, and asked if she could support me in this academic journey. This was the first act of respect and reciprocity (Kovach, 2009). Working outside my own community was new to me. I had to be mindful that even though I was Métis, with an elementary understanding of a Cree history and the Cree worldview, I was still an outsider to this community. Maria provided mentorship and gave me instruction on how best to proceed with the research in a good way and with a good mind. I have incorporated her teachings into this study, and have drawn strength from her wise advice to make the journey back home, to reconnect to the way of visiting. “Sometimes we may journey away [from home], but there are always times in our lives when we have to come for our survival” (Campbell in Armstrong, 2012, p. 32).

Challenges of visiting

Academic pressures, travel and living costs, scientific publications, and project timelines present formidable challenges to the visiting way for Indigenous researchers. Academic pressures come in the form of expectations to publish in prestigious journals, fear of failure, and the desire to transmit knowledge that bridges both the academy and the community (Kovach, 2009). Given that my research project was based in a remote community, the cost of travel and access to affordable accommodations posed particular challenges for visiting. As well, visiting was not always possible. At times, I travelled to the community and assumed that people would be available to visit, but this was not necessarily the case. Ultimately, I had to trust in the process and respect the lifestyle of the community. For example, certain times of year, such as spring and fall hunt, were not optimal for me to be in the community. Project goals, such as those of the Milo Pimatisiwin initiative, had to be implemented within certain timelines, with specific deliverables according to the funding agreement. This project did not fully take into account the way of visiting as part of a methodology. Pressures to meet project deliverables upheld a Western notion the project “success”. This resulted in at times feelings of inadequacy or being forceful, which could have had an impact on my relationship to the community and their relationship to me as a researcher.

Building a relationship requires a form of active participation that must meet Western standards of meaningful researcher-community engagement (Kovach, 2008). But relationality, which is at the centre of our research, is more complex than this. It works in conjunction with values, living traditions, social relations, social purpose, and Indigenous self-recognition. I was struck by my discomfort with visiting during my field

research (Gaudet, 2014). In my experience, the way of visiting at times unsettled the isolation that creates barriers and upholds spaces of privilege. This way of being insists that participating in research is also about fully participating in life. This means leaving no part of ourselves behind.

The visiting way as a research methodology should not be confused with the notion of “relationship building” embedded in the principles of community-based and participatory methodology (Kovach, 2009). Relationship building in a Western context focuses more on the problems and how to arrive at a better outcome or goal, rather than trusting in the process. I would suggest rethinking our approach to relationship building. The traditional approach to relationship building involves keeping an objective eye on the other, with the aim of legitimizing the research through measureable outcomes and results. It assumes an external position of acquiring knowledge from the other, and does not address or consider what happens in the relationship, during the visit, and within the self. This is not to say that the concept of relationship building does not have its place in our research. What I propose is that it not take up the entire space, and that we be cautious that it does not dictate our research efforts. Otherwise, we risk becoming rigid, deficit-focused, and incapable of listening deeply, and thus producing knowledge that is not relatable or relevant to the communities themselves or to our own inner process of transformation.

Framing research as an intervention to help Indigenous peoples improve their lives, an approach prevalent in health research, involves an assumption that Indigenous peoples are incapable of properly managing their own lives. By doing so, we risk replacing Indigenous practices and perspectives with a compartmentalized view of

health and wellbeing. Both relationship building and the way of visiting are important approaches to research methodologies. Yet it is important to recognize how they co-exist within a cultural context as well as their epistemological differences. An indigenous methodology that incorporates the spirit of visiting must leave room for the unpredictable, and cannot be entirely structured.

Chapter Four: Pimatisiwin: Women, Wellness and Land-based Initiatives for
O mushkego Youth

Equitable food access, sustainable land-based practices, health, cost of living, structural discrimination, youth suicide, addiction, and loss of cultural knowledge are familiar challenges in Indigenous communities. Individual and community wellbeing have been undermined by intergenerational stressors, including residential schools and displacement from ancestral lands. Indigenous peoples' connection to the land has long played a vital role in sustaining their kinship structures, cultural practices, and the subsistence economies that meet their needs. The importance of these connections provides the impetus to revitalize land-based practices—in this instance *pimatisiwin*, the Cree holistic conception of life.

This chapter presents knowledge gathered in a research project with the Moose Cree First Nation, located in Moose Factory, Ontario, an island on the southern tip of James Bay. The people are known as the Omushkegowuk—also Moose Cree and Swampy Cree. This study demonstrates the ways in which Omushkego efforts to restore their connection to the land have helped the communities respond to colonial conditions and regenerate cultural methods of wellbeing. Following an overview of the project context, I begin with a literature review of land-based learning and an Indigenous perspective on life-stage knowledge as cultural resurgence and as a means of fostering wellbeing for youth. An examination of the meaning of land, a description of the land-based youth initiative Project George, and the role of Omushkego women in renewing cultural practices follow. The chapter then explores the impact of reconnecting to the land and the importance of these investments in land-based initiatives.

Research Project Context & Methodology

It is important to begin by outlining the nature of my involvement with the Omushkegowuk people as this project unfolded. Moose Cree First Nation was one of the first communities engaged in a pilot project, Right to Play Canada (RTP), delivering recreational programming for Indigenous youth. In November 2011, I participated in an RTP hockey-for-development camp as part of a research partnership with the University of Ottawa's School of Human Kinetics. My role was to evaluate the development of RTP programming for Indigenous youth. At one of the many RTP training sessions, held at a Tim Horton Children's Foundation camp, the Moose Cree RTP mentor at the time, Darryl Dick, expressed interest in collaborating on a unique research project, either as part of RTP's programming or alongside it. In that initial exchange, he gave me a video called *Project George: Reconnecting Youth to the Land*. Our exchanges led to an invitation to attend the August 2013 Moose Cree First Nation Gathering of Our People (GOOP) to learn more about Omushkegowuk culture, ways of being, doing and thinking.

My time with the community began with two weeks in the community, assisting the John R. Delaney Youth Centre staff with their RTP summer youth camp program. Although there were differing views of the structure and governance of RTP within the community, emphasis on reconnecting youth to the land emerged as a common theme. Many, including the eight youths I interviewed formally and informally, expressed the need to learn the ways of the land, to learn stories and teachings from their Elders, to be on the land, and to make this connection to the land relevant within youth-centred initiatives. It quickly became evident that the land was at the heart of the people and

furthermore at the heart of *pimatisiwin*. These conversations redirected my initial research question to a broader view that would support and advocate the importance of land-based initiatives.

As a result of these formal and informal exchanges with the youth and youth workers, a project was conceived. Called Milo Pimatisiwin: Healthy Living for Youth, it encouraged youth and Elder participation in existing land-based initiatives, such as Project George, highlighting the importance of land-based skills and *pimatisiwin* teachings. My role was to learn about the land-based activities, how they were organized by the community, the desired outcomes, and how people responded. To carry out my research, I spent a total of four months in the community. I assisted with Youth Centre planning, participated in and volunteered at community events and locally-led conferences, took excursions with families, and attended cultural ceremonies such as sweat lodges. I participated in a three-day on-the-land excursion with Project George staff, fifteen youths, three female Elders, two educators, and the camp owner. I worked out of the community's Youth Centre, which further fostered my relationships with the front-line youth workers.

Nourishing relationship through community participation and social relations is a feature of a visiting methodology. As a Métis scholar participating in Indigenous health research, it is paramount to be grounded in my own history and to bear responsibility for the interests, dreams, struggles, and aspirations of the Métis and Cree people. The visiting approach of my research included learning by doing, and forty unstructured interviews and conversations with the staff of Project George, the camp owner, the chief and members of the Moose Cree Band Council, Youth Centre workers,

Elders, health care professionals, youth leaders, and educators. A reciprocal approach to participating in each other's lives led to meaningful conversations and ongoing community projects. This type of research philosophy is said to be transformative, healing, experiential, decolonizing, and lived: It invites openness, trust, and flexibility (Chilisa, 2012). It further allows for a conversational method to inform the direction and content of the research (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2011).

Learning from and on the Land

Land-based initiatives consist of activities that are directly linked to learning from and on the land. In this context, the land is considered the teacher, the leader, and the healer (Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014; Simpson, 2014). The people who facilitate land-based initiatives are cognizant of, and experienced in, the ways of the land rooted in the people's way of life. By this, I mean that the knowledge keepers understand and embody the values of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility towards the cosmology of the land: the cycles of nature, of animals, plants, and people (La-Boucane-Benson et al., 2012). As one Moose Cree Elder said at a teaching circle during the Gathering of Our People event in 2013, "the Elders wear what they know." I never forgot these words. They echoed many people's descriptions of grandparents and great grandparents who learned from and on the land. The grandparents were their connection to the land.

The land, for many Indigenous peoples, is at the core of one's being, at the core of the language, and at the core of a way of life. Robbins' and Dewar's (2011) research

on traditional Indigenous practices shares an understanding of land as connected to culture and wellbeing. They state (2011, p. 13):

With respect to the land, knowledge flows from the land and this is expressed in differences and diversity throughout Aboriginal grounds. In contemporary society, this break with the land is the single most important factor in health problems among Aboriginal peoples. Language is how knowledge is encoded. The belief among Elders is that Aboriginal language developed organically from the land. Relationships need to be strengthened (whether it is relationship between people and the land or people and institutions). It is difficult to enter into healthy relationship with others if you are not strong in your identity, language, medicine, etc.

The survival skills of learning from and on the land are typically taught to the very young by parents and grandparents (Anderson, 2011; Dorion, 2010; Simpson, 2014).

The spirit of the land is in the people's blood, bones, and flesh, as well as in their stories.

The Omushkego people's plight and right to live according to their cultural and social norms is not uncommon. Darryl Dick shared the importance of continuing to assert this right by increasing land-based initiatives for youth. To emphasize this point, he shared a story about what it meant for him to learn from and on the land:

Our people travel on the river. We have always had that knowledge. When it's windy, we know when not to go out. Safety has always been part of our lives. This describes how we as learners in our youth recognized the dangers of big waves. We listened, watched, and saw our teachers (my father) observe the water's behaviour from the north winds. High winds affected the water, which caused big waves, and that was one of the lessons we learned from our teachers. We do not go into the water without proper tools. My dad trusted me to take the boat hunting when I was growing up. I would always return it. I would leave after school and return by 11. I'd have to wait for the tide. We need to start trusting youth again, and this can be done by providing them the teachings and tools. In order to gain trust, we have to give youth knowledge: knowledge of how to travel on the river, hunting on the land in the winter and not placing ourselves in harm's way.

We need to share our old ways with what we know. (Personal communication, Darryl Dick, June 2, 2014).

There is an increasing resurgence of land-based initiatives focused on youth and community wellbeing (Anderson, 2000, 2011; Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014; Simpson, 2014; Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, & Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2014).

Maria Campbell, a Métis Cree Elder and educator from Saskatchewan, puts the focus on land as a way of being grounded in relation to being and living well:

So when elders tell us ‘plant yourself on the land, ground yourself in it, and work with it’, it doesn’t mean you should say “the wind told me this” but instead let the wind make itself a part of you and your story. Bring all the things of the land into you and let them speak. Instead of saying, “Oh I can’t work today because it’s raining, or it’s too windy.” Remember that long ago our people couldn’t shut nature out, they had to work with her, so as new artists and storytellers we, too, must work with her. That is how we honour our mother and our language (Armstrong, 2002, p. 31).

Being connected to the cosmology of the land was part of everyday living with the natural, material, spiritual, and human world. It is the ability to make meaning of our humanity. It is the ability to use nearby materials to survive. It is the ability to learn with all our senses. It is the ability to relate to and to work with the cyclical nature of life. It is the ability to “work with her”—the source that sustains life. “Land-based education sustains and grows Indigenous governance, ethics and philosophy—and life” (Wildcat, Simpson, Irlbacher-Fox, & Coulthard, 2014, p. 11). Kim Anderson’s (2011) research with Métis, Cree, and Anishnabek oral historians attests that the teachings come from their, and from their ancestors’, connection to the land.

Land-based initiatives grow from this connection, from the ground, from an intimate relationship to the elements of the land, and from parents, grandparents,

aunties, uncles, and extended kinship (Anderson, 2011; Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014; Simpson, 2014). Learning from and on the land contradicts power over the land and over the people. This grounded way of restoring balance and harmony invites new yet ancient ways of supporting youth during their adolescent life stage, often referred to by the Cree people as the wandering and wondering years. Mosom Danny Musqua, Saulteaux Elder from Saskatchewan, explained how the first stages of life are a time to foster a sense of belonging, importance, and responsibility for community wellbeing (Anderson, 2011).

Youth Wellbeing Grounded in Indigenous Thought

There is a growing emphasis within Indigenous communities on land-based initiatives focused on Indigenous youth. Indigenous youth are the fastest-growing population in Canada. The motivation to focus on Indigenous youth varies according to perspective. I will not elaborate on these differences; rather I will focus on the interconnected perspective of the Cree people's view of *milo pimatisiwin* and its link to life stage knowledge and to learning from and with the land.

The concept of *milo pimatisiwin*, which means "living the good life" or the "healthy life" in Cree, is captured in Cree laws and practices, and encompasses knowledge of holding together kinship systems, as well as guidance on how to treat one another and maintain the wellbeing of all relationships, both human and non-human (Adelson, 2002; Anderson, 2011; Hart, 2010; Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014; Settee, 2011).

The research of Kim Anderson, Cree/Métis scholar and educator, focuses on regenerating Indigenous consciousness through life stage teachings. These oral teachings were meant to ensure the autonomy of one's life within the boundaries of caring and of self-discipline, for the survival of the family and community (Anderson, 2011). Anderson (2011) further explains that the "relationship between Elders and children [was] considered critical in terms of maintaining the life force and survival of the people" (p. 168). Learning from and on the land was about the survival of the people. This way of life was experienced, tested, celebrated, and shared orally from generation to generation, most often through stories, experience, dialogue, and observation (Anderson, 2011; Simpson, 2014). Battiste and Henderson (2000) further explain that "this way of knowing has been continually transmitted in the oral tradition from the spirits to the Elders and from the Elders to the youth through spiritual teachings" (p. 49).

During one of the Right to Play trainings, Ojibwe Elder Gloria Oshkabewisens, the RTP community Elder and Traditional Medicine Woman, shared a perspective on youth wellbeing during one of the sharing circle (an Indigenous method to gathering knowledge) with the First Nations RTP Community Mentors. She explained from a Medicine Woman perspective how the main centres in a youth's body where energy flows are receptive during this particular stage of life. These centres are connected to the central nervous system. Youth reveal through their actions and emotions what is out of harmony within the systems of thinking, learning, feeling, and being, as well as what is needed to restore wellbeing in their lives, families, and communities. Youth expose the imbalances and the sacredness in human and non-human relationships.

They tell us what exists and what is missing in our homes and communities and in society as a whole. Oshkabewisens wanted the youth workers to understand the youth through life stage teachings grounded in Indigenous thought and consciousness. I was intrigued by this perspective on youth, given the nagging rhetoric that often lays shame and blame on youth's unacceptable behaviours and that often absolves societal responsibility to care for the whole person and to consider historical and cultural context.

Karen Pine-Cheechoo shared in one of our conversations that the adolescent stage of life is when young people search for what their families and communities need to live a balanced life. It is a time for them to plant their own prayers. The life stage teachings dictate community governance, ensuring that every person has value and a place of longevity in the circle of life (Anderson, 2011). During one of my visits to the community, I participated in a life stage teaching held in a traditional circular structure with a small fire burning at the centre. This teaching circle was being held during the Gathering of Our Peoples event. A community Elder addressed how each life stage was inextricably linked to community wellbeing, from conception to Elderhood. As such, each stage of life played an important role in the governance of people's wellbeing and healing (Anderson, 2011). I also heard this same cultural belief from other people in Moose Factory. One community leader anticipated that the return of the life stage teachings could be what transforms the Omushkego people's communities.

The values, stories, and teachings that accompany the life stage of adolescence teach self-discipline, self-reliance, roles and responsibilities, respect, reciprocity, and the "co-existence between interdependence and individualism" (Anderson, 2011, p.

69). This knowledge is transmitted through the activities of learning from and living on the land: fishing, hunting, trapping, harvesting berries and medicines, gathering water and wood, building shelters, cooking, sewing, and healing. It was part of life, a way of living well. "Work was part of a child's land-based education, and was very different from the formal education system" (Anderson, 2011, p. 82). This type of learning is to prepare them for their adult years and to ensure the physical survival and care of their people.

A connection to the land is woven into the stages of life and into the life knowledge transmitted during each stage. It is critical to bring back the awareness of those life ways back in order to apply Indigenous methods of wellbeing. As Kim Anderson (2011) explains, "young people today go through a longer period of transition from childhood to adulthood, and in our communities they are facing many challenges" (p. 11). One of these challenges is that adolescents become parents and care-givers at a younger age without having received the life stage knowledge and teachings of childhood, youth, child-rearing, and adulthood. The youth are too busy raising children and surviving to learn from the Elders. Young people have to quickly adapt to child-rearing practices without years of care and preparation shared by the kinship system. This is a concern being addressed in many Indigenous communities through traditional child-rearing initiatives whereby all members of the community are invited to attend.

Land-based initiatives reflect the positive movement towards restoring Cree land-based skills specific to the acquisition and preparation of land-based foods, ecological knowledge, and life stage roles and responsibilities, including child-rearing

practices. These initiatives address the loss of cultural knowledge and the breakdown in communication between generations. Much research, and many people within the community, speak of how residential schools have interfered with the natural transmission of knowledge between generations (Anderson, 2011; Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009).

The issue of youth wellbeing cannot be examined in isolation from the intergenerational transmission of historical trauma. Historical trauma is trauma that moves through generations when unresolved (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). There has been an extensive amount of research demonstrating how colonialism and social control through the domination of Eurocentric thinking drive and re-inform historical trauma. To help understand the complexities of settler-colonialism as an ongoing phenomenon, Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux and Magdalena Smolewski (2004), in their research with the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, categorize and describe three waves of colonization: cultural transition, cultural dispossession, and cultural oppression. They address each category in the context of generations of disconnection from the land. The intergenerational burdens compromise the enduring legacy of Cree knowledge systems that sustain cultural identity, kinship, and cultural values (Anderson, 2000; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004; Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009). New research on community-led initiatives is emerging. The initiatives are being told in order to help relearn what health and wellbeing mean from an Indigenous perspective.

The movement toward “putting things back together” through the telling of land-based initiatives offers another way of thinking about health and wellbeing (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2004, p. 87; Iskes-Barnes, 2009). “In telling stories, we honor the

experiences of Aboriginal people and epistemologies, as well as their contributions to multiple, collective and collaborative readings of our world” (Iskes-Barnes, 2009, p. 35). The Omushkego people continue to critically address their plight for justice, healing, and the rightful assertion of Cree thought. They are relearning to apply their own theoretical and methodological approach to the health and wellbeing of their families and community. This approach highlights the relationship to life rather than problems to be managed. It further inspires a renewal in learning roles and responsibilities that differ at every stage of life, both for males and females. Neither is more important than the other, given that from an Indigenous perspective both support the wellbeing of the whole circle in unique ways.

I observed, heard, and experienced the sharing of women’s knowledge during my time in the community. The transmission of these teachings is growing, and the recognition of women’s role in community leadership and wellbeing is increasing. The wisdom of Mosom Danny Musqua is well-known to Indigenous peoples: “We never had any doubt that women were the center and core of our community and our nation. No nation ever existed without the fortitude of our grandmothers, and all of those teachings have to be recovered somehow” (Anderson, 2011, p. 3). I often heard from the community that grandmothers were respected as bush camp leaders—often referred to as the boss. They instilled an emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual connection to land, to identity, and to relationships (Anderson 2011; Altamirano-Jimenez & Kermoal 2016). “Indigenous women’s ways of knowing are shaped by their livelihoods and shared experiences of racism, colonialism, and by their experiences as leaders, mothers, sisters and grandmothers” (Altamirano-Jimenez & Kermoal, 2016, p.

9). An extensive body of research has demonstrated how this type of knowledge is too often excluded in the knowledge production process (Altamirano-Jimenez & Kermaal, 2016). The next section provides context to help understand the historical role of Cree women, specifically in the Moose Cree homeland. Privileging Cree women's perspectives in land-based initiatives re-affirm how "gender roles and responsibilities stem from and are part of broader relationships. That is to say, Indigenous peoples and societies differentiate between the roles that women and men assume based on social interactions and survival needs of their collective society" (Altamirano-Jimenez & Kermaal, 2016, p. 9-10). Highlighting a historical role of Cree women provides context for the later section on Omushkego women's contribution to the Moose Factory land-based initiative, Project George.

Cree Women and the Transmission of Cree Life-Ways

Ohmagar and Berkes' (1997) study explores the correlation of the transmission of Cree knowledge, such as bush and survival skills, with the role of Cree women. They examine the changing nature of transmitting such knowledge and further identify challenges and factors that have impeded the transmission of traditional knowledge and skills. The authors find that the typical modes of transmission—such as observation, learning by doing, and apprenticeship—are less effective under modern-day conditions. The changing educational environment, inefficient time in the bush, delayed transmission of knowledge, and changes in value systems are four of the factors (among others) that they find have influenced women's traditional roles and responsibilities. Despite changing economic conditions, the study suggests that "about

half of the traditional Cree bush skills [96 technical skills were assessed]are still being transmitted” (Ohmagar & Berkes, 2007, p. 218). Although these findings appear to demonstrate that a strong way of life has been maintained, the study does not address the long-term impact of the loss of traditional knowledge and skills on the Omushkego Cree. Their findings conclude that there is a need to increase budget allocations that produce long-term benefits for the people themselves and, secondly, to make it feasible for Cree women to transfer traditional knowledge and skills.

Regina Flannery’s anthropological research provides valuable insights into the Cree way of life in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. She seeks to learn about the Cree way through Ellen Smallboy’s stories of the land. Smallboy was born in 1853. She lived a semi-nomadic life in the James Bay area and spent her last years in the community of Moose Factory. Her stories centred on her life at Lake Kesagmi and French Creek. Family hunting territories along river systems were the main areas that the Cree people occupied prior to Moose Factory becoming a permanent reservation. Smallboy’s life story recounts the traditional way of life that revolved around seasonal hunting as well as the dramatic changes to the James Bay Cree society during and towards the end of the fur trade period.

The research shares glimpses of the Cree connection to the land. Living in harmony with the land was a way of life (Flannery, 1994). It was common for women to stay alone in the bush, hunt, and take care of camp responsibilities. Many women were familiar with the qualities and uses of the forest plantation, barks, and plants to make medicines. The women learned as early as age six to make fishnets and to care for the

trap lines. It was not uncommon for women to leave the bush camp to go to the trap lines. This at times meant leaving the children behind. Ellen Smallboy explained that “she thought the best way to prepare the children to look after themselves was to ‘explain everything to them, telling them there was someone up above who would take care of them, so they shouldn’t be afraid’” (Flannery, 1994, p. 40). Children were taught not to be fearful of their natural environment. They were made aware at an early age of the precautions that needed to be taken in order to survive.

By the mid-1900s, the economically-centred path of the Eurocentric worldview was taking a toll on the Cree way of life (Flannery, 1994; Niezen, 2009; Preston, 2002). The practice of using up all parts of the game was gone, and food access and preservation were limited. The railway brought curious tourists to Moose Factory. Cree religion was integrated into Christianity. Cree kinship systems, values, life stage rituals and cultural beliefs played a smaller role in the management of community wellbeing. Parents were less strict with their children. The discipline and strong mental capacity that came from surviving on the land was no longer required. Stories of the land stopped being told, at least in public social settings.

The Omushkego People: The People of the Land

For millennia, the Omushkego lifestyle involved seasonal movement adapted to hunting and harvesting. The people lived a semi-nomadic existence, making best use of the ecology, the abundant land and water, food, and material resources. Similar to other Indigenous peoples across Canada, the Omushkego of the Moose Cree First Nation were forced to modify their land-based culture as a result of colonial systems such as band,

reserve, and educational systems. The development of the fur trade depleted critical food and material resources, forcing people in the region to become dependent on Western technologies, food, and material items. Compounding this were the forced introduction of permanent settlements and the Indian Residential School system, impositions that transformed a way of life intimately tied to the land. This resulted in cultural disassociation, whereby Cree cultural traits were substituted with another culture's values.

In the 21st century, the Omuškegowuk people live with this legacy of dependency. They are fighting to hold on to land-based cultural practices and to make them relevant to contemporary life. This regeneration of Cree values has led to community members proudly sharing their knowledge of cultural practices—in particular, practices centred on food, language, rituals, and gatherings. As the Associate Executive Director of the Moose Cree First Nation, Bertha Sutherland, explained, the land “urges each person to remember and to reclaim who they are” (personal communication, Bertha Sutherland, January 16, 2014). She and many other community members referred to reclaiming their inherent rights, culture, and language as part of the process of reconnecting to the land.

The Omuškegowuk people often describe their connection to the land as tying them to their ancestors, who lived and relied on the land as a way of life. The Cree way of life is typically characterized by land-based practices, such as hunting, gathering, trapping, and fishing. But it is more than activities. Lawrence Martin, former Omuškego Grand Chief, elaborated on a Cree view of the connection to the land: “It refers to the

idea that we are extensions of the land, our lives are directly linked to it, for water, food, and dreams” (personal communication, Lawrence Martin, February 10, 2015). When discussing land-based practices, community members often used the word “feeling” to describe a connection to the land. Allen Sailors, Director of Health Services, explained that a connection to the land needs to be experienced, and more important, felt. He observed that feeling can be strengthened by time spent on the land and spoke of the land’s power of healing:

The land and that connection changes you. [...] The land is not to try to possess or to rip apart, it is a living creature, and your whole attitude changes. That’s why whatever you take from the land, you got to put something back. When you have that connection, you learn how to respect the land, and you realize there is that healing power that comes from the land (personal communication, Allen Sailors, January 17, 2014).

Nathan Cheechoo, a young man and father, shared his feelings toward the land: “I believe in the power of the land, because I felt it, time and time again” (personal communication, Nathan Cheechoo, August 1, 2013). For Nathan and other community members engaged in land-based activities, the land is about learning discipline, commitment, dedication, and determination to live life. In this context, the physical and mental effort of finding a moose, looking for tracks, using one’s voice as a means to call the geese, preparing the camp, staying warm, melting snow, setting up the hunting blind, and getting up early are the physical and mental efforts required to feed one’s family.

Others explained how the land was, and is once again, the natural forum to convey *milo pimatisiwin*—what the ancestors did and how they survived through harvesting,

hunting, fishing, and gathering. Kiersten Wapachee, a young woman, explained that her grandmother seeks to instill what she calls a “traditional feeling” in her grandchildren. This is to ensure that they do not lose their way within the mainstream educational system. She explained that her grandmother talks about the past, and her father talks about the present. Her granny taught her how to pluck geese, cook bannock, and survive in the bush. The young woman further expressed her fear of what would happen if Elders did not teach traditional knowledge to the youth: “If they stop teaching us what it was back then, then it will be a different world” (personal communication, Kiersten Wapachee, August 2, 2013).

The lack of knowledge about the land, and the disconnection of generations, raise concerns in the community. Drug and alcohol use among youth and parents, both indicators of alienation, is a common concern. Earl Cheechoo, Deputy Chief, offered another significant element to this conversation:

Many youth are in a spiritual crisis. They don't know how, or who to pray to. They are stuck in between or have withdrawn from believing. Their thinking is affected from historical legacies and our current community practicing religions. Our community has five active churches and three traditional groups. We have a community population of twenty-five hundred, and we are all family and friends and are associated to each group. It is hard when you hear family or friends put down each other because they belong to the other group. It is not only the youth that are affected. But once we realize we all pray to one Creator God we feel ok and start to acknowledge and live healthier. Spirituality is key to life (personal communication, Earl Cheechoo, January 15, 2015).

Earl elaborated by explaining that they are decolonizing their thinking by returning to their own customary Cree laws and by challenging government policies.

The Moose Factory community is responding to these concerns. Rather than focusing on deficits, they are reconnecting youth with the land. I do not recall anyone mentioning the land as a faith or a religion, yet appreciation is consistently given to the land. The principle of reciprocity— a cooperative interchange of giving and receiving in relation to the land—was seen as one of the most important relationship teachings. Land-based initiatives engage the attention of the youth, fostering interactive and experiential learning from and with the land. Paul Linklater, Vice Principal of Delores D. Echum Composite School, explained:

The youth have to go on the land and interact with it. This is the key to youth participation. That is how rich we are in our culture. [...] We engage and interact and have the knowledge of the land. We have to go back to our roots (personal communication, Paul Linklater, March 20, 2014).

These deliberate efforts to reintegrate land-based practices in families, schools, and community initiatives have important implications for what Karen Pine explained as a lack of understanding of what it means to be *illewuk*, or a Cree person. “Without the connection to language and the land,” she said, “one loses touch with where they came from, and how they lived” (personal communication, Karen Pine Cheechoo, January 13, 2014).

Concerns specific to youth wellbeing have led to the development of a Youth Services Department. Its objectives are to improve youth networking in the Mushkegowuk Region and to increase youth engagement and youth leadership, knowledge, and skills. The former Grand Chief of the region explained that, to achieve sustainable youth wellbeing, Cree youth teachings need to be revitalized. He referred

me to a recent report, posted on the Mushkegowuk Council website and containing the results of a community-based inquiry into suicides. A grassroots response—in this case to an intergenerational legacy of colonization which includes youth suicides and addictions—is this community's main approach. Project George is an example of a grassroots, land-based initiative emerging from a need to help the youth reconnect to the land.

Project George: Reconnecting Youth to the Land

Project George is a land-based initiative that began in 2009. Charlie Cheechoo, now Project George's Coordinator, was approached by George E. Eechum, an Elder who was concerned that the youth lacked physical activities that would divert them from video games, drugs, and alcohol. A few years later, an 18-year-old young man also named George (Cheechoo) approached Charlie and asked to be taken out to catch fish. After their fishing trip, the young man asked if Charlie would take out more youth, should they acquire the equipment to do so. Stan Louttit, former Grand Chief, explained in a media interview that many youth in the community wanted to participate in these types of activities but were unable, due to the expense and other circumstances beyond their control. Charlie was able to acquire the gear, and three months later he took a group of six youths to his friend's camp. This was how Project George started. In 2009, the community experienced a youth suicide crisis, making it even more apparent that the youth were facing considerable challenges and that something needed to be done to help them. The positive feedback generated as a result of youth participation in the

land-based activities Charlie was offering boosted support for formalizing what became known as Project George.

The mission statement of Project George is to bring at-risk youth into the bush and to help them connect with the land and with Cree traditions for the purposes of recovery and personal growth. The project's objective is to contribute to the betterment of the lives of youth who have been affected by the trauma of poverty, family breakdown, and suicide. The initiative facilitates the learning of Cree skills and values such as fishing, trapping, hunting, setting up camp, and caring for the camp and for each other through experiential and intergenerational learning on the land.

In its first years of operation, Project George operated on donations from local organizations and corporate donors. These contributions covered the expenses of camping equipment, food, lodge rental, travel costs, equipment repair, and salaries. The Moose Cree First Nation has also subsidized Project George by funding the salary of the Program Coordinator and providing an office space and computer in the John Delaney Youth Centre. Since 2009, Project George has been able to bring 200 youths to camp for three to ten days at a time. Grants from Ontario First Nations Limited Partnership, Casino Rama, and Trillium Foundation have enabled an increase of youth participation in land-based activities. Other collaborations with band members such as William Tozer have enhanced camp space for Project George and facilitated other land-based excursions that are not directly part of Project George.

During the spring hunting cycle, typically in April, smaller groups of young men are taken for up to a month at a time. During the months of May and June, the project

takes an average of 50 youths on fishing and camping day trips to local camps, with some longer trips to camp Onakawana. July has too many bugs to go out. Not only is going out on the land physically and mentally demanding, requiring extensive preparation, there is the material reality of bugs, bears, and other dangers that are known to few.

During the month of August, trips are typically organized with various organizations, such as church groups. During the months of September and October, the focus is on moose hunting, setting nets, and gathering wood for the winter. November and December is freeze-up time. It is a time to stay in the community. January to March is a time for trapping, winter camping, skidooing, cutting wood, and hunting. On average, Project George takes out approximately 60 youths during this time for shorter day trips. It is important to note that Project George takes each youth on multiple trips as a means to develop a community of leaders grounded in learning from and on the land. It seeks to provide youth with more than a one-time experience.

Project George serves the youth community, both male and female. In some instances, entire families participate, enjoying themselves while revitalizing cultural knowledge connected with the harvesting of traditional foods. There is an element of spontaneity in Project George trips. As Charlie explained, “there is no formal kind of structure, and even when you’re out there, there is no formal structure” (personal communication, Charlie Cheechoo, January 13, 2014). Unlike the more structured and often rigid programming typical in the South, Project George is relaxed and fluid. As a

result, William noticed a difference in youth behaviour on the second day of being at the camp:

A natural bonding occurs just letting youth visit, share and be together. Their days are not filled with keeping them active and entertained. We like to keep it simple. [...] We are here to learn the land and from the land (personal communication, William Tozer, March 19, 2014).

Charlie explained that they are guided by the land, as well as by the youth:

The weather dictates what we do, so it looks different every time. The kids look forward to it. Most of the time it is them that decide what to do. Let's go fishing. Okay, let's go. What are we doing in the morning? I don't know: It depends on the weather. Let's eat breakfast first. One of the things I really fight against is structure. When we take our own ideas in the bush, you don't plan activities, you just do them. You have an idea of what you are going to do. That's what I take to the project. First of all it depends on the weather. We're not going to leave if it's 40 below (personal communication, Charlie Cheechoo, January 13, 2014).

Although the project may appear unstructured, a structure unequivocally exists. There is an element of surrender to the land, rather than control over the land.

Part of the responsibilities of working for Project George is giving back to the community, for example, by bringing firewood to the Elders and assisting in community events. The program teaches youth the importance of giving back by sharing what they hunt with their families, the community, and the Elders who are not able to go out on the land. Approximately 75 percent of the wild food harvested is shared with the community. These actions speak to a way of life that does not merely bolster self-confidence and self-esteem, but also teaches the responsibility of being helpers and role models who instill dignity and defeat stigma. The project environment accommodates the youth, ensuring meaningful, safe, and successful learning. Safety was often

mentioned in conversation, as it was increasingly taken into consideration, given environmental changes and the increase in youth participation. In addition, training in first aid, chainsaw and firearms safety, driving on snow and ice, and Moose Cree versions of safety and survival courses are offered through Project George. These courses are made relevant to their environment.

Project leaders and youth workers believe that land-based initiatives have reduced youth consumption of alcohol and drugs. The Project George youth workers felt that they were part of something bigger than themselves, having gained knowledge of survival on the land. Donovan Cheechoo, who has been working with Project George for three years, openly shared how he felt on the land: "I feel like the ancestors are there with you and watching. I belong to them, and they to me" (person communication, Donovan Cheechoo, January 14, 2014).

Project George youth workers set up the hunting blinds and help build the cabins, tent frames, and lean-tos. They show the younger ones survival skills, such as tracking and setting rabbit snares, catching and cleaning fish, and hunting and gutting moose. The youth workers felt that this knowledge has helped the younger ones to know and benefit from their traditions and culture, whether or not they are out on the land.

Although Project George began small, it has been successful in providing youth the opportunity to have experiences, to heal, and to learn about life from the land and on the land. In the spirit of long-term visioning, strategic and long-term financial plans were developed in 2013 to establish Project George as a permanent outdoor

community education program. The youth workers have also shared their vision of this initiative, and their hopes that land-based programming will continue and that more youth and Elders will attend. They want to help other First Nations communities in the James Bay region to create similar approaches for youth who would normally be unable to participate in land-based activities. They spoke of the importance of updating and maintaining the Project George Facebook page, and of offering consistent, seasonal land-based programming. Donovan shared his experience of a three-day paddling trip up the Moose River, where they learned how to paddle, how to camp, and how to ride the rapids. He dreams of more trips like this. The youth workers suggested that the local leadership include the youth in the process of assessing the value of land-based initiatives such as Project George. Some of the evaluation questions that the youth felt could benefit the recognition of this land-based initiative was: "What did it feel like? How was your experience? What did you learn? Would you go again?" These evaluation questions were not formally implemented as part of this research project, rather they were shared as recommendations with the Project Coordinator. Facilitating land-based evaluations has not been an easy task for the community. Such evaluations can be perceived as being attempts to justify outside funding criteria. The youth workers further dreamed that Project George would own its hunting camp and create its own logo, based on the theme of reconnecting with the land and the activities associated with land-based initiatives.

Youth engagement in land-based practices instigates an array of emotions from the community and enthusiasm. It stirs the community's concerns related to youth

wellbeing, leadership, types of land-based activities, spirituality, economics, safety, equity and sustainable programming. Recognizing that social challenges are not isolated to youth, Project George has grown to include the community. Despite the fact that men coordinate and run the program, women play an integral role in its development. The next section will highlight women's contributions to Project George and their views on the importance of land-based programming.

Women's Contribution to Land-based Initiatives

As the project evolved, women from the community (including Elders) became engaged because of their unique knowledge and prudent management of the household. They are centrally involved in land-based practices, and their expertise was often required to effectively manage certain aspects of the program. The involvement of women led to the enrichment of land-based initiatives in ways that welcomed young women. It also promoted collaboration with organizations in the community, including the local churches, the John Delaney Youth Centre, and schools. Women also provided different methods of learning, teaching, and relating to the land.

In Cree, *eskoe* means women and is used in the context of female/male principles, roles, and responsibilities. Lawrence Martin explained how they go together:

It is further an abbreviation to other words that relate to life, to time, and to fire. In terms of *eskoe*'s connection to life, it is one who stays with life for its entirety. In terms of time, it refers to responsibility. In terms of fire, it has to do with giving life and taking life. When describing female, it has nothing to do with woman, rather it is the one who shows care and who nurtures (personal communication, Lawrence Martin, August 13, 2014).

He went on to say that this could be a child, a moose, or a plant. Given the broader purpose of re-establishing the connection of youth to the land, much of Cree values are tied to the balancing of the male and female principles. In the context of Project George, the women not only made this community initiative more culturally relevant, but they further enriched the experience by increasing its accessibility and knowledge base. Their stories and experiences of the land are unique to them as Omushkego women. Their concern with the broader meaning of land is different from men's. Both perspectives are needed to ensure the wellbeing of the whole.

Over the course of a particular land-based excursion, I observed how the women provided care, food, instruction, and traditional knowledge to the youth and to their helpers. As they instructed, the women never once raised their voices, blew whistles, gave orders, or established rules or punitive consequences, nor did they need to. I experienced the grounding and reassuring effects of their presence and commitment to the youth. They directed the kitchen and took care of all the meals and the heating of the lodge—our living space. As they prepared food, they shared stories and laughter. One Elder, Agnes Wesley Corston, taught the youth and educators how to skin a rabbit. They all huddled around the kitchen table and listened attentively. I took photos and recorded what felt like a very important lesson. As she skinned the rabbit, she told anecdotes of her life and of the ways in which all parts of animals were used. She explained that even the rabbit ears were put on the fire and eaten as treats, and laughed as she drew a parallel with potato chips. She also discussed the subsistence value of all

parts of the animal, such as rabbit fur, which was used to make coats or put inside socks or gloves for warmth.

In conversations about the unique meanings associated with connection to the land, the women spoke about their concerns with the contamination of food today, and how this affects the physical lives and minds of youth. They spoke of life in the bush, of how their mothers taught them to clean geese, and of how it was necessary to make use of all parts of the animal:

We even clean the heads and wings, and we used the feathers to make comforters. We used all parts. We used to clean all the guts too and make goose lard. We had a good, hard life. The only thing we threw out was the poop. We never knew what alcohol was growing up. My sister and I had a wooden bed. Everything was saved (personal communication, Mary Cheechoo-Linklater, March 19, 2014).

The women spoke about the medicines of the land—for example, how their grandmother would get sap from different trees to heal illnesses. Two women in their seventies remembered clearly the journey from Moose Factory to their traditional family territories in the bush. They talked about how simple their time was in the bush and how they relied on the land for most of their subsistence.

These women expressed their concern with what the youth are facing today in the community. They felt that the youth would need to learn to live on the land again because of the problems with food contamination and with the way the world is changing. Agnes commented, “That’s why it is good to bring the children out; they get to taste the food we used to eat “ (personal communication, Agnes Wesley Corston, March 19, 2014). Food from the land plays a relational role, helping youth to be grounded in

the philosophy of *milo pimatisiwin*. Traditional food-related practices evoke a sense of belonging, often relayed through stories and learning by doing. The women provided knowledge about a way of relating to their environment that ensured an empathetic connection to the past, present, and the future.

Land-based practices provide collective experiences where community members participate in their unique capacities. I observed this collective practice when Agnes kindly instructed her son to offer two geese for the camp excursion. The geese were prepared and cooked over an open fire in a teepee structure. All the while, the women shared stories. Learning was ongoing, as they restored a connection to the land by embodying the knowledge and spirit of the land.

The benefits of connecting to the land extend beyond the youth, to Elders and the community. The women repeatedly shared their enthusiasm for taking part in the land-based excursions. Elder Mary Cheechoo-Linklater said, "It helps us to remember our life" (personal communication, Mary Cheechoo-Linklater, March 19, 2014). These memories included loving relationships with their parents, long days of walking to their camps, a drug- and alcohol-free lifestyle, encounters with bears, the hard physical labour of hunting moose and preparing foods, including harvesting and preparing medicines, and hard times when food was scarce. The simple act of eating berries from the land evoked memories of learning from their own mothers and grandmothers how to use all parts of the animals for clothing and for household comfort. Their reflections of the past were associated with what made their people strong and self-reliant. Other memories were of what was lost as a result of the Indian Residential School System. In

1855, Horden Hall Residential School was established in Moose Factory, enrolling mainly students from the traditional Omushkego territories. Some of these women's relatives attended the school, and as a result they did not learn the ways of the land. For many in the community, the residential school severed their connection to *whakotowin* and undermined the *milo pimatisiwin* way of life. As mothers, aunties, sisters, and grandmothers, they now helped the youth to know the Cree values and ways of life. These women were confident that by simply "being out on the land, that traditional knowledge would stick to their insides, because the land is part of them too" (personal communication, Mary Cheechoo-Linklater, March 19, 2014).

For quite some time I have reflected on the words of Karen Pine Cheechoo. One evening, visiting over tea, she shared her journey as a young woman reconnecting with the land during the 1970s. She referred to this time as waking up the Elders. Ironically, she recounted that "the Elders were not sleeping; they simply needed a space to educate us" (personal communication, Karen Pine Cheechoo, January 13, 2014). The land was historically the context for learning and teaching. She further emphasized that it was not necessarily *what* the Elders taught them, it was *how* they taught them:

There was a lot of language saying we have to wake up our elders. [...] So we went and they started educating us [out of the community, on the land]. All of us women, we would sit together and have to clean 100 geese. We'd sit and clean all day. The next day, we'd be cooking all day. We'd do different foods and feed the guests we had invited. These men would sit and tell stories. They'd show young people how to make a net. It became a community of learning. It was like the spirit of our community began to grow. There we felt the community spirit. [...] They would talk to us about our relationship and it would be done in humour. Women's work and men's work doing their thing. There was always lots

of communication. It wasn't so much what they said, it was a lot of how they said. It wasn't the words, but it was how they said it. How they said it made more sense, made people feel more, or invited people into that conversation (personal communication, Karen Pine Cheechoo, January 13, 2014).

When reflecting on women's unique contribution to the community, there is a tendency to focus on what they do and what they teach, as opposed to the ways in which these things are done. I mention this as it appears to be vital in conversations about the importance of land-based learning and the involvement of Elders. The transfer of knowledge goes beyond specific skills; it is about belonging to a people and a place, having a respectful relationship with the land and one another, and knowing that a culture of self-reliance requires access to land, generations of people, and cultural values. These women lived and embodied what Allen Sailors shared about the Cree concept of the four human laws, taught by the land itself: kindness, strength, sharing, and honesty (personal communication, Allen Sailors, January 17, 2014).

The Impact of Reconnecting to the Land

The voices of the people prompt deeper consideration of the consequences of reconnecting to the land. In this section, I will explore these consequences. A priority expressed in the interviews was to determine what was important to the community in relation to their experience and knowledge of reconnecting to the land. Three main impacts, invariably woven together, emerged in the community conversations: (1) restoring a sense of wholeness through kinship systems, (2) fostering cultural continuance through stories, and (3) recognizing the value of women's contribution to

community wellbeing. By no means are these three categories all that there is to know. They do, however, offer an indication of the impact of reconnecting to the land.

Sense of Wholeness

Restoring the Cree sense of wholeness through kinship relations comprising human and non-human animals, plants, stories, dreams, and rituals, requires connecting individuals to land-based practices and values. The Cree ways of being on, and with, the land yield a collective strength that replaces individualism and social isolation. There is no overarching authoritative body governing land-based practices. While leadership and facilitation exist, set up and maintenance of the camp is typically done through collective engagement.

There is a strong belief that being on the land enhances the feeling and knowledge that one is part of the land. The following story of the land brings this belief to life. Eli Chilton, Radio/DJ Producer for the community radio station, shared a story about an encounter with a water mammal. It was a dark night. He was camping near Cochrane, Ontario, surveying the land.

It came closer and closer. I couldn't see it but I could hear it clear as a bell and it came right up to my feet. I was trying to look through the darkness where it actually was. My head was pointed in the direction it was, but I didn't panic or feel any fear. My imagination was running wild and I wasn't afraid of the dark. I could hear it sniff me. I could hear that, wow. I could hear it waddle away, enter the water again and swim way. That's an example of that comfort level. When I am there, it is home. It is comfortable as anything as you can imagine, like a blanket coming out of the drier and putting it on you. That's how deep that feeling goes when I am there. There is no fear or anxiety. It just is. You are with it and they're with you, whether it is animal or a tree or a rock (personal communication, Eli Chilton, January 13, 2014).

Although it is necessary in a contemporary context to inform youth of the logic behind their activities, there exists an inner knowing which is stimulated on the land. The land heightens the senses, as well as intuition. Consequently, reconnecting to the land is about survival, preserving a sacred way of life, and restoring a sense of belonging.

The spirit of belonging reaches beyond what is often referred to as bush life. It extends itself to enhance one's engagement in, and reflection of, community life. According to Sailors, "It is about being together. It changes how we understand each other. When you are out on the land, you think about how you live in community—how you act and how you interact. You start to think about that when you are out there" (personal communication, Allen Sailors, January 17, 2014). It was repeatedly asserted that the land provides individuals with the essential elements from which to draw strength in daily life. While ways of connecting to the land differ within the community, feeling at home on the land was an often-repeated conversational theme.

People from all generations stated that feelings of peace, grounding, and stillness brought a welcome pause from modern-day demands and responsibilities. Asynee Apay Shko, an Omushkego mother and health care professional, explained that the land is a place to reconnect with herself. "That's what I do when I get back from the city. [...] I feel called to go to the land because I feel displaced. [...] I need to go ground myself. I talk and sing to the trees. [...] I know they like the songs. It draws positive stuff around me. My children are taught why that is where they need to go" (personal communication, Asynee Apay Shko, March 17, 2014).

The deep desire to live in harmony with the land, in accordance to the values of their ancestors, was predominant in community conversations. Coming to know oneself through the knowledge of ancestors—how they lived and where they came from—was often expressed as important to the community. The generations who have been taught by their grandparents, and who remain engaged in land-based practices, have become important mentors. As part of land-based initiatives, the Elders share history and knowledge of what it meant to live on the land. The knowledge of accessing food and plant medicine played a role in sustaining self-reliance and an active lifestyle. As Elder Agnes Wesley-Corston explained, they would never sit idle on the land; they had an energetic physical life:

You had to get your food and even your medication. You would make poultice from the land. My grandfather would get some sap from different trees. I had impetigo for a month. My mom got poplar tree buds, cooked them on the stove, and it went away in three days (personal communication, Agnes Wesley-Corston, March 19, 2014).

The Elders' stories were found to be motivational. Going back to the land to reconnect with home evoked for many the desire to reconnect with their physical life, by taking up the demands of setting up camp and gathering wood, water, and medicines. In addition, knowing one's identity in relation to the land and to one's relatives inspired a learning spirit to want to know more—of one's history, language, teachings, and stories of the old way of life.

The Storytelling Way

Storytelling is a common Cree method of teaching and learning about survival and about life. There is strength in those old stories as Cree thought is often embedded

in the diversity of stories (ed. Ellis 1995). The stories are precise, and told over and over again. Time and again, it was emphasized in the conversations that the land provides non-linear learning to transmit knowledge, values and teachings through stories. Many community members provided examples of the types of stories shared as they sat in the blind during the spring goose hunting season. The themes of these stories varied: their connection as a people to the geese, hunting strategies, the geese's flying patterns, and how the geese prepare themselves to offer their lives for the nourishment of the people. Many community members emphasized that, in addition to teaching and learning, stories facilitate intergenerational bonds between family members. In this context, Allen Sailors further suggested that the land shapes the conversations that emerge:

You start talking, and that is the healing, when we talk. And sometimes the child may want to know the history of their family, who was their grandparents, what did they do, how did they survive. [...] You pass on survival skills to the youth. So if they ever get stuck when they are alone, they will know what to do. They don't have to be afraid of anything out there (personal communication, Allen Sailors, January 17, 2014).

Through cultural stories and Cree legends, families are once again teaching one another about being self-sufficient, connected to what is needed to survive, and sensitive to the diverse challenges that may arise. The lack of dialogue in the community itself between generations is a concern; therefore, land-based initiatives offer a renewed space of expression.

Life stories inevitably carry the pain and tensions of lived experiences. These too are increasingly being communicated in culturally- relevant context or in the privacy of

home. Restoring communication and fostering strong connections between family members begins to destabilize the stereotypes and nuclear systems defining and undermining Cree life ways. Learning acquired through one's kinship disrupts Western-based systems of knowledge that focus on and promote individual success and a nuclear family model. Stories are perceived as shifting the unequal relational dynamics within families and, more broadly, within community life.

Reconnecting with the land does more than increase food access. It is more than being engaged in a process. It is the awakening of cultural practices and knowledge expressed and embodied in the land, language, and stories. This knowledge can often be shared very naturally while plucking geese, skinning rabbits, sitting in blinds, gathering and preparing medicines, and setting up fishing nets. Stories hold timeless forms of instruction on how to live in accordance with Cree life ways. For instance, stories embedded with land-based teachings re-inforce wellbeing not an individual goal, but rather recognized as a collective responsibility (Anderson, 2011).

One story shared by Arlene Faries, a mother and storyteller, further demonstrates one of the ways that Cree notion of kinship relations are part of the process of restoring a sense of wholeness and cultural continuance, the latter inextricably tied to connection to the land. The Cree legend involves a young boy who has run away to the forest because he felt he was not good enough. Eventually, he gets lost in the forest. The storyteller explains that a large gray songbird, Whiskeyjack, well-known as the reporter of the forest, sees the lost boy. Whiskeyjack remembers that they had forgotten to give the boy his spirit name and reports this information to all its

forest relatives. They sing the boy a song embodying his spirit name. They then tell him to go home, reassuring him that he will be a good hunter. It is believed that that there is strength in the spirit name, as it guides one's actions and one's roles and responsibility to the community. This story reminds us that one's spirit name provided a sense of social purpose, direction and meaning to one's life.

Women and Wellbeing

Reconnecting to the land has helped people within the community to better understand their roles and responsibilities in affirming the ancient values and principles of *pimatisiwin*. This knowledge is being regenerated in the community as a means to strengthen the healing and wellbeing of families. Christina Linklater, a mother and health care professional, explained what the traditional Cree walking out ceremony meant to her. It is a specific rite of passage, representing the children's first steps and their connection to the land, the animals, the water, and the life that will sustain them. For an entire year, the child is kept off the land. After a year, the family and community gather to witness, to feast, and to celebrate the child's first steps on the land.

It gave me a sense of purpose knowing where I came from. [...] To know that I would have the strength to get where I am going someday. I know it's part of my role to do these ceremonies, and it is my role to ensure that my children will know what was shared with me. It was a promise to keep that alive for them. And that life is precious [...] that they will journey and it will be hard sometimes, but there will always be a support system for them, and you can always go to the land for healing [...] for prayer, and for meditation (personal interview, Christina Linklater, March 19, 2014).

Rites of passage such as placenta burials and walking out, snowshoe, and moon time ceremonies were once lost as a result of residential schools. Their revival has been made possible by the efforts of some families to secretly maintain these practices in intimate family settings. The ceremonies are only now making their way back into the community. I also observed and participated in family events (inclusive of extended family and friends) such as welcoming the arrival of a child or celebrating a child's first year. These rites of passage, held in the community complex or Youth Centre, are an important part of Cree culture. The collective responsibility for each child's wellbeing was evident in the acknowledgement of a broader community of aunties, uncles, and grandparents.

The continuity of Cree life ways transmitted through women is evident in land-based societies (Anderson, 2011). "While the care of children was a matter for the collective, there were distinct roles in childrearing according to age, gender and position within the family [...] Men were less involved in the primary care of young children because of the nature of their work; up to the age of seven or eight, children typically spent time with grandparents, older siblings, and mothers" (Anderson, 2011, p. 71). Given women's prominent role in fostering a sense of belonging and connection to the land, family, and community, there is an increasing recognition of the need to focus on women's wellbeing and healing in land-based initiatives. Although the conditions required to implement such initiatives were not discussed directly or part of the study, underlying themes such as the need for time, trust, accompaniment and space were some of the factors.

There is a harrowing concern that, as a result of residential schools, Elders have forgotten how and what to communicate in order to preserve cultural continuity. Land-based practices were once related to teaching and learning Cree child-rearing practices. Despite the disruption of the intergenerational transmission of parenting skills, grandmothers remain role models. It was commonly expressed that when people spoke about their connection to the land, they thought of their grandmothers, and often prayed to them during difficult times.

Given the lack of resources and availability for female Elders to provide consistent apprenticeship (which is lifelong and typically involves a small number of apprentices), a circle of women are helping each other to restore their families' and their grandmothers' ways. Asynee Apay Shko explains how through ceremony, ancient teachings, circle work, visiting, and prayer, they are completing the circle of knowledge and, in her words, "bringing things together and being role models for others" (personal communication, Asynee Apay Shko, March 17, 2014). The renewed connection to the land is helping them to learn how to care for themselves again, and how to care for their families in a different way. They are educating themselves by relearning the ways of the land and by helping one another in their healing journeys. Awareness that the community will not heal until women and their families heal is emerging in community consciousness. As a result, some of the women have identified a need to develop land-based initiatives specific to young women. Their respective connections to the land have helped them to recognize their spiritual and creative force

in sustaining these critical links to young women's wellbeing inclusive of life style choices.

This awareness has moved women to action. Women are reclaiming their rightful place, gathering knowledge and teachings. They are taking greater leadership roles as grandmothers, mothers, aunties, and sisters, and are bringing Cree knowledge into their workplaces, health department, Band Council and educational systems. Their efforts, as Earl Cheechoo shares, are not going unnoticed. "Women are going to take the leading role in our healing journey. I see within the community they are really standing out. You know they are talking. Their voices are getting stronger—all these strong women, which is why we are who we are today" (personal communication, Earl Cheechoo, January 15, 2014).

Western systems of thinking rendered Indigenous women powerless, interrupting their voices, their knowledge, and their important role in ensuring family and community wellbeing (Anderson 2011). Land-based initiatives strengthen their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual connection to land, identity, and relationships.

Discussion and Conclusion

When working with Indigenous peoples, we cannot rely on a compartmentalized approach to understanding individual and community wellbeing. The link between land, culture, food, youth, and health in Indigenous communities is evident and well-documented (Adelson, 2000; Anderson, 2011; Field, 2008; Flannery, 1995; Palmer, 2005; Wilson, 2003). For the Omushkegowuk people, their ways of being are interconnected; all elements of life are relationally connected. The goal of this chapter is not

to make claims about these linkages, nor is it to present a one-dimensional perspective on the Omushekego people's connection to the land. Rather, it is to demonstrate the diverse ways of regenerating land-based methods of wellbeing.

External youth programming and funding increased in this community at the time of the 2009 suicide crisis. Such programming was initially focused on suicide prevention and was often driven by outside organizations that lacked a community-centred exchange of cultural knowledge in addition to Western approaches to wellbeing. Yet, through this tragedy, programs expanded to offer land-based initiatives to youth. People started to recognize and to reposition Cree knowledge systems as the foundation of youth and community wellbeing. This recognition and repositioning displaces the prerequisites and programs of Western-based approaches, which too often pathologize youth, further alienating them from their traditional ways of connecting with the land.

Connection to the land carries important meaning in a specific cultural context that is more than simply a physical space. It is related to inner and outer space, where re-education in the ways of the Elders and the roots of *pimatisiwin* can be felt and known. This allows for a wider lens, reaching beyond land-based programming and local subsistence practices to the broader social contexts of family, community, and local knowledge as sites of continuity and empowerment.

The Omushkegowuk people are entering a new, progressive phase of growth, both economically and socially. They are increasingly assuming control of their own

connection to land, lives, and bodies, and it is important that intrusive outside influences be minimized. The colonial legacy has penetrated the surface of the land with its perverse mechanisms of assimilation through cultural repression. Yet the Omushkego people have a connection to the land that is deeper than the surface, and there is no language to theorize this connection but their own.

Withstanding the ongoing challenges in Northern First Nation communities, Indigenous peoples are reigniting their sacred fires of knowledge, of history, and of culture as a means to counteract damaging colonial histories. The greater emphasis on women's contributions and approaches is important in order to renew people's connection to critical life sources. In this context, going back to the land is not only literal, but also involves remembering that people are an inextricable part of the land. This chapter is about the importance of ongoing investments in sustaining land-based initiatives. It is also about highlighting the traditional authority and knowledge of women and their vital contribution to *milo pimatisiwin*. By understanding the historical role of women in restoring connections, we gain insight into the increased impetus for specific land-based initiatives that inspire cultural diversity and community wellbeing. We further gain insight into the importance of long-term investments in community-driven initiatives as a means to sustain the wellbeing of Omushkego youth.

Chapter Five: The Milo-Pimatisiwin Project: Good Living for Mushkegowuk Youth

The fact that we have them [the *pimatisiwin* teachings] is a huge step in sharing traditional values, beliefs, and stories with modern technology. This project has helped create a launch pad for future cultural programming at the Youth Centre. The radio allows people to listen and learn anonymously, which can be a wonderful way to start for beginners.

—Carmen Chilton, Director, John Delaney Youth Services, Moose Cree First Nation

Entire generations of Indigenous peoples have missed out on cultural teachings that were typically transmitted orally through stories, experience, observation, and Elders. Intergenerational stressors, including residential schools and encroachment on land and resources with little consideration for the use of the land in the future, have led to this gap in knowledge exchange. Indigenous peoples' connection to the land has long played a vital role in sustaining their kinship structures, cultural practices, and subsistence economies (Robbins & Dewar, 2011). The importance of this connection provides the impetus to revitalize land-based practices—in this instance, *milo pimatisiwin*, the Cree holistic conception of being well and living well.

This chapter presents a collaborative project that emerged out of a research study with Moose Cree First Nation in Moose Factory, Ontario. Moose Factory is on an island on the southern end of James Bay. Approximately 2,500 people live on the island, 974 of whom are youth under the age of 17. Since time immemorial, the Omushkego lifestyle has been intimately tied to the land and to family. The people lived with their environment, making best use of the abundant land, water, food, and material resources. With profound cultural changes emerging as a result of various factors, land life ways also changed, including the transmission of survival skills and knowledge

between generations (Flannery, 1994; Long, 2010).

This chapter will address the following key question: To what extent does the *milo pimatisiwin* strengthen inform youth programming? The purpose of this article is to contribute to the understanding of *milo pimatisiwin*, and to explore its practical application to community and youth wellbeing initiatives. We begin with a Moose Cree perspective on the concept of *milo pimatisiwin*, followed by a review of the existing literature. The project context, methodology, overview of the project phases, results, and feedback from youth involved in the project will follow. As this chapter will demonstrate, the Director's vision and youth experiences provide important insights that can help on the path to fostering wellbeing.

We [the two authors] come from different Indigenous identities and places. Yet we have both uniquely experienced and felt the loss of connection to land and to life stage teachings. In our respective journeys, we have started to relearn and to reassert the life stage teachings in our personal and professional lives. Given our shared passion for and understanding of the significance of these teachings for individual and collective wellbeing, we are committed to helping our families and communities acquire the knowledge needed to grow our life-knowledge bundles and to make them applicable in a current social context. Further, we see this collaborative project as a part of our life stage responsibility as adult women.

Literature Review: The Good Life Tapestry

Everything was integrated in the pimatisiwin teachings: governance, justice, spirituality, family and community was part of it. It was done in

accordance to the world around us and the seasons. We did not try to fit the world around us and we fit into it. We cannot schedule fasting until the buds formed around the trees. We worked with the natural cycles. The land told us when to do these things.

—Carmen Chilton, Director, John Delaney Youth Services, Moose Cree First Nation

The Moose Cree term *milo* means good while *pimatisiwin*, translated literally, means life. “Cree is polysynthetic. This means that a single word in Cree can express complex ideas that would need many separate words in other languages.”⁴ Descriptively translated, *milo pimatisiwin* represents the cyclical nature of life and provides guidance on how to live in right relationship with the Cree notion of kinship relations. Kinship relations include visible and invisible beings, spirits, animals and plants as well as human being and even the earth itself. This is important for the understanding of land-based initiatives as an expression of *milo pimatisiwin*.

The understanding is that *pimatisiwin* teachings are a necessary part of asserting sovereignty over one’s right to live and be well in co-existence with the land and with one another. The holistic meaning of *pimatisiwin* situates one’s place of belonging, roles, and responsibilities articulated in the life rites of passages and kinship relations (Anderson, 2011). Connection to the land is a central expression of the cultural practices, rituals, stories, and ceremonies of the Ojibwe people.

A Broader Understanding of *milo pimatisiwin* and its practical application

Milo (or *mino*) *pimatisiwin* is often translated as an interconnected worldview of

⁴ Description of the Cree language comes from the book launch event in Moose Factory, Ontario, on August 7, 2015.

living and being well (Anderson, 2011; Adelson, 2000; Hart, 2010; Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014). “A worldview is the overall perspective from which one sees, experiences, and interprets the world” (LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012, p. 5).

Milo pimatisiwin is respected as a lifelong, continuous learning process, in constant motion and interaction with the cycles of the land (Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014). The term *milo pimatisiwin* is not unique to the Moose Cree people. The Ojibwe people also use *pimadiziwin* to describe the central value of health and wellbeing (Manitowabi & Shawande, 2012). *Mnaamodzawin* is equivalent for the Anishnaabe people in Manitoulin Island, Ontario. It means a “good, holistic way of life” (Manitowabi & Shawande, 2012). Despite these differences in terminology, common values and common understanding weave together in this good life tapestry. “This [*mino pimatisiwin*] is a term used to describe holistic health and wellness, including physical, emotional, mental and spiritual stages of being” (Anderson, 2011, p. 7). Leanne Simpson (2011) explains that the knowledge of *mino bimaadiziwin* (the good life) exists in Indigenous theory, creation stories, teachings, and experiences. She explains that an identity grounded in the land “propels us towards *mino bimaadiziwin*” (p. 13).

In the last decade, Indigenous researchers have contributed to the contemporary use of the term *milo pimatisiwin* (Hart, 2010; LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012; Gross, 2014; Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014). This signals a new relationship between Indigenous and Western worldviews. It is an effort to translate Indigenous knowledge for the purposes of improving the conditions and wellbeing of

Indigenous peoples. The idea of *milo pimatisiwin* is increasingly being applied to various health and wellness initiatives. For example, Lawrence Gross's (2014) book *Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing and Being* refers to a board game called "Minobimaadiziwin: A Good Way of Life," developed for those who seek to reinforce the Anishinaabe value system. The verb "seeking" is often found in discussions of the good life. Seeking *milo pimatisiwin* implies a process of understanding and regenerating Indigenous wisdom, values, ethics, and ways of life. This goes beyond the tired binaries of the healthy and the unhealthy, the oppressor and the oppressed, the privileged and the marginalized.

Michael Hart of the Fisher River Cree Nation applies the idea of *milo pimatisiwin* to his research methodology in the field of social work. His aim, to address the social needs of Indigenous peoples, is presented through an Indigenous helping approach. He elaborates on five foundational concepts to achieve *milo pimatisiwin*: wholeness, balance, relationship, harmony, and healing. None of these concepts is hierarchical. Rather, they are steps on the path toward *milo pimatisiwin*, described as "healing, learning and life in general" (Hart, 2002, p. 44).

Gross's (2014) extensive research provides an in-depth look at *mino-bimaadiziwin*. His study examines this concept first within the traditional culture, and then looks at how it has been applied in the modern age. His critique challenges the notion that the Anishinaabe worldview—which he frames as Anishinaabe religion—has been lost. He argues that the ethics of conducting one's life in a good way continues to exist today. "The teaching of bimaadiziwin operates at many levels. On a simple day-

to-day basis, it suggests such actions as rising with the sun and retiring with the same. Further, *bimaadiziwin* governs human relations as well, stressing the type of conduct appropriate between individuals, and the manner in which social life is to be conducted” (Gross, 2014, p. 207). He goes on to say that the teachings, the *bimaadiziwin*, permeates the relationship to all life and facilitates a respect for all life, and for every stage of one’s own life. Stories and storytelling are the methods used to transmit the teachings and “direct one’s actions” (Gross 2014, p. 208). The ways of coming to know the good life—including “knowing one self and developing relationship with spirits [...] the Anishinaabe value system [...] respect for nature in general”—vary from fasting rituals to the development of the aforementioned board game “Minobimaadiziwin: A Good Way of Life” (p. 217). Gross’s study asserts how the “teachings of *bimaadiziwin* are centered on living in this world” (p. 205). This speaks to the teachings of *bimaadiziwin* as the continuation of a living tradition that is still applicable in a contemporary context.

The Chisasibi Cree Nation healing model underlines the return to the land as a way to restore community wellness and balance (Radu, House, & Pashagukum, 2014). This group refers to *miyupimaatissiun* as their Cree concept of wellness, or way of life. Intergenerational knowledge transfer and experiential learning form the basis of this land-based initiative. Chisasibi Elders guide the program and assist the participants in rethinking the way that they relate to themselves and others. Framed within the broader movement of cultural regeneration and the reclaiming of Cree ways of healing and wellness, living a good life “means to be able to hunt and trap and pursue other land-based activities, so that he or she has access to food and warmth and is able to

enjoy life and to participate actively within the community” (Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014, p.95). The program situates Indigenous ways of healing and wellness as an approach to decolonizing current models of health care.

The Sacred Relationship project, a partnership between researchers and Cree Elders of Alberta, explores *milo pimatisiwin* in the context of the Canadian government’s current water policy (LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012). The project examines colonialist policies and ideologies of land ownership that have ruptured the good life. The participants argue for the reparation of Indigenous-settler relations to foster the good life for all Albertans. This is done in the context of understanding the meaning of water through the knowledge of *whakotowin*. Indigenous Elders such as Maria Campbell (2007) remember the cosmology of *whakotowin*, a term which means to honour and to respect all relationships.

Anderson uses the laws of *whakotowin* to describe the arteries of the good life. *Whakotowin* theoretically informs her research on life stage cycles and reconstruction of native womanhood. She explains “how story-telling, the use of games, positive role modelling, and rites of passage ceremonies” were designed to facilitate the good life in child-rearing practices (Anderson, 2011, p. 68). Rite of passage ceremonies included the values of nurturing, discipline, self-reliance, and interdependence through the entirety of one’s individual and community life. Repeatedly it is said that the good life was not an individual goal. According to an Indigenous perspective of health and wellbeing, the good life is seen as a collective, shared responsibility mediated through life cycles.

The concept of *milo pimatisiwin* plays a critical role in the decolonizing of notions of health and wellbeing in research practices and community-centred initiatives. Many Moose Cree First Nation people have shared their concerns about how they have moved away from ways of caring for one another—ways that were essential to land-based survival. The revival of *milo pimatisiwin* provides an excellent basis for breaking down social isolation and for restoring Cree practices of wellbeing, the values of family kinship systems, and the community itself.

Cree knowledge systems intersect with the language of the people. *Milo pimatisiwin* is embedded in the Cree language and in ways of being, doing, and thinking. It is a way of life. For this reason, it is difficult to understand the Cree conception of living and being well from a Western viewpoint. Seeking to understand Indigenous thought from the perspective of a Western worldview can reproduce Western ideas of health and wellbeing that privilege singular truth, linear and rationale thinking (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). In collaborative projects that are accountable to various stakeholders, the larger issue is attempting to find a language that bridges the academy and the community. It is important to avoid placing Cree ways of knowing into Western categories. It also remains vital to consider that notions of traditional and cultural knowledge differ among individuals within the community (Robins & Dewar, 2011).

Research has demonstrated the harmful effects of paternalism on community wellbeing and research (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009). Paternalistic attitudes have supplanted the ways of fostering *milo pimatisiwin*. Such attitudes are expressed and experienced as the dominance of one group over another. Paternalism is based on the

Greek word for father; it is devoid of Mother. Yet, as Maria Campbell reminds us, women's role was to keep *whakotowin* together (Anderson, 2011). This was the adult women's role and responsibility. Yet attitudes of power over the "other" was and is widely practiced by governing bodies, including Band Councils and Canadian Indigenous political bodies, who believe they know what is best for Indigenous peoples. This approach has undermined Indigenous views and methods of health and wellbeing. Indigenous practices and research methodologies aim to breathe life into "cultural regeneration," meaning "a regeneration of indigenous cultural, spiritual, and political practices" (Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, & Coulthard, 2014, p. 111). Some of the methods of cultural regeneration being applied by Indigenous communities are being referred to as land-based pedagogy, land-based education, or land-based initiatives. It is only in recent years that knowledge and teachings on health and wellbeing are being seen as integral in historical, social, economic, political and cultural initiatives.

The Milo Pimatisiwin Project Context

The Milo Pimatisiwin project was the outcome of a methodology of the visiting way and funding from Students for Canada's North, a University of Ottawa initiative to support the cost of living for a student, and to support existing and new land-based initiatives for youth. The Moose Cree community led the student researcher (Janice Cindy Gaudet) to the main research question and to this very project. This relationship began with a visit to the community where the researcher interviewed six youths working for a summer camp program designed by an outside organization (Right to Play Canada), six full-time front line youth workers, the Youth Services Manager, and

four members of the Band Council. The researcher also had numerous conversations with a broader range of community members. The intent at the time was to evaluate the externally-designed youth program, with an aim to strengthen recreational programming in the community. The interviews reflected interwoven themes: reliance on knowledge keepers, knowledge of the land, and reconnecting with the beauty of Cree culture. These themes guided the Milo Pimatisiwin project and relationship between the researcher and the John Delaney Youth Center.

Knowledgeable of the effects of the Indian Residential School System, the community was concerned with loss of trust: trust in youth, Elders, Cree knowledge, one another, and in the ability to be self-reliant. The Students for Canada's North program, an initiative spearheaded by the University of Ottawa's Centre for Global and Community Engagement, provided an opportunity to collaborate on a project supporting the preliminary research findings. The principal researcher contacted the Youth Centre Manager, the Right to Play (RTP) Community Mentor, the Project George Coordinator, and the Associate Executive Director of Moose Cree First Nation, to solicit interest in a collaborative project designed to strengthen culturally-relevant programming at the Youth Centre. Based on their agreement and direction on project objectives, a first application was submitted by the principal researcher to Students for Canada's North. Given the success of this first project and the recognition of the need for continuity, a second application was submitted and approved.

In December 2013, a two-phase project was conceived—Milo Pimatisiwin: Healthy Living for Omuşkego Youth. The first phase of the project was designed and

implemented from January 2014 to May 2014, and the second from May 2015 to August 2015. The community identified two project objectives: to foster intergenerational exchange of knowledge and to strengthen program collaboration within the community. When the first round of project funding was approved, the Youth Centre staff had changed, as did the leadership and position function. The new Director of Youth Services was supportive of this initiative, given that her vision was to strengthen Cree cultural values, traditions, skills, and teachings at the John Delaney Youth Centre (JDYC).

Overview of Project Phases & Activities

In the first phase, the JDYC built on their existing program, Project George. The project funding supported the hiring of two Cree youths to work with Charlie Cheechoo, the purchasing of a snowmobile sled for hauling supplies to the bush camp, and cultural programming of the Youth Centre. This included honorariums for knowledge keepers (the honorarium amount was determined by the Director) to provide teachings and to run its first culturally-based week-long youth camp. In addition, a first series of online *pimatisiwin* teachings were recorded and transmitted with the guidance and DJ leadership of Eli Chilton on 107.1 FM, the Island Radio Station.

The second phase of the project built on these first initiatives and the Students for Canada's North objective of demonstrating sustainability. The project proposal was designed to enhance project sustainability and capacity-building within the JDYC. The project focused on a culturally relevant survey to find out from the community what they thought about services being provided by the JDYC, and to solicit their vision for

youth wellbeing. The principles of the Northern Cree metaphor of the Canoe Trip for conducting research were employed to design the survey (Michel, 2012). In addition, land-based initiatives (such as traditional walking out ceremonies, youth-centred sweat lodge ceremonies, and trapping and fishing excursions) were part of the project activities.

Land-based initiatives also included teaching youth how to fish, how to set a net, how to use a fishing rod, and how to clean and prepare fish for cooking. The youth were linked with Elders and other individuals with significant traditional land knowledge. Youth were also given the experience of learning the basics of moose hunting. They gained basic knowledge of gathering and preparing Cree traditional food, as well as the related traditional values. These values included making an offering for the animals, giving thanks for what the land provided, and connecting with others—especially Elders, Cree youth, and the children’s teachers.

For Cree people, the land, language, family/community relationships (which provide education, social wellbeing, and justice), and spirituality are interwoven, and not segregated as in Western practice. It was expressed that a spiritual connection is gained when Cree people return to the land. This can be hard for individuals to comprehend when the connection to the land has been severed. The land provided everything needed to live well. Reconnecting to the land provided not just physical nourishment (from the food harvested and physical activities required) but also mental, emotional, and spiritual nourishment.

Research and Project Methodology

Participatory, experiential, and relational values played a significant role in the project and research approach (Gaudet, 2014; Kovach, 2009, 2010; Michel, 2012).

Indigenous methodology centres on regenerating cultural knowledge and employing decolonizing strategies. These efforts are not isolated from one another.

The research and project initiative supported the Omushkegowuk people's interests and concerns. Building on existing programming in the community, the Milo Pimatisiwin team engaged four community youth workers, a radio DJ/producer, four Omushkego knowledge keepers, the Youth Services Director, the Project George Coordinator, and the University of Ottawa student/researcher. For the duration of the project, the project coordinators, the Youth Services Director, and the principal researcher dialogued with the Centre for Community and Global Engagement and the Associate Executive of the Moose Cree First Nation Band to implement project objectives, activities, reporting, and results. A conversational method ensured that ongoing dialogue guided the process (Kovach, 2010). This resulted in fluidity, transparency, trust, and the co-creation of this study. The final evaluation of the Milo Pimatisiwin, designed by the University of Ottawa's Centre for Global and Community Engagement, was completed by the JDYC Director and the University of Ottawa student (Cindy Gaudet). The community students were also engaged in the evaluation process either through telephone, email or in person. Their responses to the evaluation formed part of the project lessons learned.

Several different knowledge-gathering methods were applied to ensure

mutually beneficial outcomes for all parties involved (Chilisa, 2011; Kovach, 2009, 2010; Wilson, 2008). Visiting, conversations, and learning by doing were employed to follow the process, results, and lessons learned. Chris Hunter, a Cree language educator, determined the ethics specific to the knowledge transmission of *pimatisiwin* teachings. He was responsible for this portion of the project.

***Pimatisiwin* Teachings Protocol**

One of the first steps to be respected when working within an Indigenous context is cultural protocol (Hart, 2010; LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012). Cultural values inevitably inform the research and project collaboration. A relational way of being, learning, and doing requires accountability and responsibility to the knowledge keepers. Respect of cultural protocols ensures that knowledge is treated and used in a good way.

It is the act of showing respect [...] it is the acknowledgement that learning occurs in the context of relationship [...] it is the acknowledgement of the time and effort the teacher has dedicated in the pursuit of knowledge. Observing this protocol, therefore, affirms commitment to—and enhances—the learning process. (LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012, p. 2)

Cultural protocol in both research and community-centred projects goes beyond the academic ethical requirements of signing consent forms. For this project, it was important for Chris Hunter to ensure that he received family blessings to pass on his late grandfather John Joseph Chookomolin's teachings before proceeding. Chris explained that he would not have participated in this project of sharing the teachings online or archiving the teachings if he had not received this blessing from his mother. We are grateful to Chris and his family for reminding us of the importance of respecting

protocol and the lineage of teachers, and for their lifelong dedication to protecting this knowledge. In reflecting on the results of the project, Chris shared his experience:

My overall experience has given me the opportunity to pass on *mino pimatisiwin* teachings to the next generation. It made me appreciate the Indigenous teachings of the Cree people. These teachings have withstood time since time immemorial and have survived to modern era. Bringing back old teachings of the Cree people into the modern era made me proud of who I am. I really appreciate this experience. I always wanted to document, record, and share our Cree teachings that our Elders safeguarded. I honestly believe that in the generations to come after I pass on to the spirit world that our way of *mino pimatisiwin* will be well known, documented, and passed on, for I believe it is in good hands (personal communication, Chris Hunter, September 11, 2014).

Among the challenges for gathering knowledge were the timeframe, and the difficulty in collecting stories from Elders in other remote communities who still live in accordance to the *pimatisiwin* teachings. Given that many Elders are not connected to modern technology, the only way to receive their knowledge is to visit them. This was not possible because of the tight project timeframe and unbudgeted resources for community students to travel.

The Milo Pimatisiwin Project: Deliverables & Challenges

We have lost trust in the youth. In order to gain trust, we have to give youth knowledge. Knowledge of how to travel on the river, hunting on the land, in the winter and not placing ourselves in harm's way (personal communication, Darryl Dick, June 2, 2014).

We recognize that the project objectives were lofty. Yet much was accomplished, with care and consideration for what could realistically be achieved. Both phases of the project involved learning from and with the land, either out on the land or at the John Delaney Youth Centre. The initiatives were diverse: cultural camps, community feasts,

pimatisiwin teachings, and traditional rituals such as the walking out ceremony and youth sweat lodges.

Moose Cree Cultural Camps

The two cultural camps were typically day-fishing trips, trapping, and setting rabbit snares. These excursions included stopping in to visit friends and families at their bush camps. The purpose was to expose youth to the Cree way of life, to Cree knowledge, and to land-based ways of learning. The objective was to involve unrecognized and informal leaders and knowledge keepers in these initiatives, and to strengthen the sharing of resources between other youth programs that run out of the JYDC. Silos of information were an ongoing challenge, and therefore bringing together a few service providers was encouraging for youth program facilitators. The cultural camp component of the project served as a template for future cultural camps. In between phases one and two, a full-time cultural and language program coordinator was hired at the JDYC. This position fostered ongoing program collaborations, which resulted in Fish Week, Spring Hunt Week, and Moose Week.

Modernizing *Pimatisiwin* Teachings

Another significant component of the project was the recording and broadcasting of seven *pimatisiwin* teachings modules over Youth Island Radio 107.1. This evolved into a *milo pimatisiwin* manuscript that remained the intellectual property of the community. The teachings broadcasted over the radio consisted of what Christopher Hunter's grandfather called "knowledge of life." These teachings were mainly transmitted through story. The stories were personal experiences, teaching

stories, and cultural stories. They included parenting values, marriage customs, the meaning behind word such as *wachiay*—the Cree greeting, rite of passage knowledge, and other topics. All of these teachings are about a good way of life. The radio station was able to determine that 100 people tuned into the live broadcasts of the Milo Pimatisiwin teachings (via online streaming). It was harder to know the exact number of those dialing in. With the information archived, the radio station has shared it repeatedly and continues to do so.

The *milo pimatisiwin* teachings remain part of the JDYC's resources and the radio station's archives. The archives established a cultural foundation and a learning tool for generations to come. The radio broadcast allowed people to learn anonymously, given there is still a fear/distrust of *milo pimatisiwin* knowledge. The delivery of teachings through modern technology provided listeners with anonymity and the private space to restore trust in Cree knowledge. As a result of Indian residential schools and its Christian influence, people were taught not to trust themselves; the *pimatisiwin* way of life was shamed. Community members feel that land-based learning has to happen quickly, yet it is a lifelong process involving all generations. Meanwhile, Cree knowledge keepers are shrinking in number which poses a risk to losing connection to the land.

Given the positive feedback from the *pimatisiwin* live streaming, the project sought to build its capacity by increasing the accessibility of the communities' stories of the land. *Pimatisiwin* teachings were elaborated and translated into Cree for further sharing on the community app called <http://moosefactorystories.com>. This component

was developed along with another funded JDYC project. This complementary project involved the development of a community app allowing youth the opportunity to listen to, and to learn from, Cree cultural teachings and stories using modern technology.

Pimatisiwin teachings were also made accessible through a rite of passage ritual called the walking out ceremony at the John Delaney Youth Centre. This event was aimed at young families who wanted to learn Cree values and rites of passage but did not know how to do so, or who to approach. Six babies touched the earth for the first time as a way of introducing them to the world (physical and spiritual), with their families and friends fulfilling their personal and collective responsibility. This is a practice that is not commonly practiced or known, but initiatives keep these important rituals from being lost. The critical function of land-based knowledge, such as *pimatisiwin* teachings, is that it teaches children and families a good way of living based in their cultural roots—the Cree way of relating to life.

Youth & Community Engagement

A third deliverable was the engagement of community youth to work on the project. The purpose was to create sustainability within the community by providing youth with an opportunity to nurture their gifts and strengths. Some of the challenges for hiring community youth were related to administrative issues, criminal record checks, scheduling, and conflicts of interest. Despite these challenges, four community youths—mostly young adults—were contracted. They provided important perspectives on their experiences and valuable insights on ways to strengthen Youth Centre initiatives.

Learning from and with the Youth

The *pimatisiwin* youth helpers felt that they strengthened their skillsets by putting a voice to their life experience, sharing stories, gaining confidence on the land, applying what they learned at school, and teaching how and what they learned to the younger ones. They felt they were able to connect with the youth because of their own life struggles. The *pimatisiwin* youth helpers could empathize with the boredom, the isolation, and the lack of guidance for healthy living.

It was a growing experience, too, especially working with youth. Before I wasn't really good with younger people in terms of talking to them. It helped me to grow personally and to explain and to talk to them in a way that they'd understand. The youth seemed bored at times and we would encourage them. Be more like a friend than an authoritative level. (Milo Pimatisiwin Cultural Camp Helper, personal communication, August 6, 2015)

Training with Project George actually made myself more confident, comfortable and also gained new knowledge of the outdoors than I have recently possessed within myself. (Milo Pimatisiwin Cultural Camp Helper, personal communication, August 22, 2014)

One youth worker was concerned with the lack of positive role models in the community and the normalization of drug and alcohol use. She felt that the lack of support and coping mechanisms made it difficult for youth to make different life choices. Two youths were concerned with the lack of planning on the part of the JDYC. Given the project's significance in providing emotional and spiritual support, they felt it was important that youth and parents be better informed of the projects.

I believe the project would become more successful and known if we would accept a wide range of youth of different ages and even parents to join us on our expeditions and activities around the community. (Milo Pimatisiwin Project George Camp Helper, August 22, 2014)

Activities could have been planned out more ahead of time and lack of communication in terms of location of events made it difficult. It worked out in the end. I think in the future planning stages need to be strengthened. (Milo Pimatisiwin Cultural Camp Helper, August 6, 2015)

One youth expressed concern that the regulations on boat safety and licensing would replace the value of knowledge keepers who had grown up on the river. He felt more reassured travelling with and learning from the old men, rather than travelling with and learning from someone who had just gotten a boat license. He further emphasized that he would trust them more than he would trust himself.

Some of the challenges are that some of our most experienced men on the river don't have a boating license. But now, apparently, there is a need to have a boating license. The ones who have been doing this for years, their whole life, can avoid any dangerous incident and accident than someone like me who just got a license. I hope they think about this. (Milo Pimatisiwin Cultural Camp Helper, August 6, 2015)

This youth's experience brought an awareness of the potential for new boat drivers to learn from the Elders. This would result in another means to foster intergenerational learning. Book knowledge from the South may not necessarily apply to this remote region. We discussed with the youth the possibility of designing a Moose Cree version of boat safety, and, in fact, this is how they prefer to learn. This showed the importance of practical hands-on learning, as emphasized by the youth:

Practical hands-on approach to learning basic skills is important to get a feel for it. Even basics, like making a fire, are important. When you go out to the land with some knowledge, you begin to see what the medicines, what the tools, are what is needed, what is out there. This is important because not much people are knowledgeable about culture and land and just see the surface. I feel people need to be taught more about and do not get much exposure to that kind of cultural activities. I hope exposure brings deeper respect for our culture. It feels like it is slowly dying [...] it just feels like it is really important for people to learn the basics of being

in the bush, and how to do certain things to build a foundation for the youth to build on. Expose it to them and see if they like it. (Milo Pimatisiwin Cultural Camp Helper, August 6, 2015)

Each Milo Pimatisiwin project helper brought valuable insights, concerns, and recommendations on how to continue to invest in and to improve land-based initiatives. They expressed the challenges involved in engaging youth and providing them with opportunities for land-based learning, given the influence of drugs and alcohol in the community. Many of the youth have expressed repeatedly that they want to learn and to have access to these events. Yet turnout still remains low for some events, while others surpass expectations. Within the community, many of the youth feel they are unimportant. What they would like to see made available seems to be ignored or dismissed by the leadership.

The impact of colonialism and Indian residential schools is still present in the community. Traditionally the children and youth were at the centre of communities and families. Around the children and youth were Elders, teachers, and guardians. The women surrounded them, and the men protected them. With the multigenerational impact of colonialism, the removal of the children and youth has altered learning systems and values within communities. Children and youth feel this, live this, and start to believe this. The struggle to shift these values is an ongoing challenge. The Youth Services Director seeks to find the balance between providing activities for youth and ensuring that they are safe when they participate in these initiatives. Finding the balance between Cree traditions and modern-day requirements, laws, and practices is a real challenge.

Cree-specific Evaluation Tool

In phase two, we produced a Cree-specific assessment tool to assist the JDYC in evaluating its own successes and strengths. This was a direct result of the challenges encountered in the first phase of the project, and aimed to provide an alternative to the notion of success from a Western-based funder's perspective. The purpose was to reflect the community indicators of success, in addition to creating a process whereby Cree values and priorities could inform and guide evaluations (Michell, 2012). Using this tool, a community-based survey was implemented to provide clarity on ways to strengthen the vision of Youth Services, and to grow the use of the community radio station. Below is the summary report of the survey findings:

A community-based evaluation was held during the Moose Cree Gathering of Our People's event, August 5 to 7, 2015, Moose Factory. On the opening day, August 5, 2015, the Youth Center amongst other organizations set up tables to provide updates on activities. The John Delaney Youth Center took this opportunity to ask their community for input on how they felt Youth Services and Local Radio station were doing and what areas could be strengthened. The booth was set up between the hours of 1:30 to 4:00 pm and most everyone who approached the booth were happy to provide input. From this, we can draw conclusion that the community cares deeply about helping to strengthen the Youth Services Department.

Overview of respondents:

Forty community members responded to the questionnaire. Out of the 40, youth were the highest score of participants (13), then parents (12), grandparents (9) and relatives (6) which constitutes part of the kinship system – aunt, uncle, sister, brother.

Youth Services Department

Question one:

In terms to the question of what you like about what the youth center currently provides, the following programs emerged from highest score to lowest:

- Sports/gym
- Activities (indoor/outdoor)

- Programs (after school, etc.)
- A place where children go to.
- Games/workshop for all ages/tournaments
- Sexual education/drop-in/leadership trips/culture/safe environment/youth-led/events/camping trips

Question two:

In response to the question of the three most important aspects of youth wellbeing: cultural knowledge was the highest score. This was followed by recreation/athletics and sports and career development. Language training followed then wellbeing, spiritual, arts and crafts, land-based activities. Special events and entrepreneurship were included and received the lowest numbers.

Question three:

In response to the question, what's stopping youth from using the Youth Center? Lack of advertisement and Fear of bullying had the highest scores. Bored of the same activities and location were the following two responses.

Question four was developed to solicit a better understanding of how the community understand their role as youth helpers. Volunteerism and encouragement were the top two responses.

Island Radio 101.7 Section

The second section of the survey was to help the Youth Island Radio be increasingly used by the community. The lack of context to the question created challenges in terms of the capacity to respond to the questions. I observed that when we explained the question and provided context, that answers provided responded to the intent of the question. It is most likely that the responses provided [with explanation] tell us that the people understood this question as actually tuning into the radio station. Despite this, some good ideas and solutions were provided and could still be useful to enhance use of the radio station. In the few conversations we had, it would appear that people were shy to be on the radio or were too busy to make the time to go to the radio station. Some of the solutions were better advertisement, teaching ones willing to work on the radio, hold an information session, and offer a tour of the radio station. One youth wanted to make sure no one was in the booth watching her while one youth expressed that she would appreciate her family being there to support her and to overcome her shyness.

In terms of the question, whether you have heard other programming (ie. Milo Pimatisiwin teachings) than music, over half of the respondents said yes (21), while 16 said no. Majority responded that what they heard was excellent and good. Four said it was average and five said fair. No one said what they heard was poor. Again, we were unsure as to whether they were responding to the radio station broadly or to other programming.

The Vision of the Director of Moose Cree Youth Services

Over many years, the John R. Delaney Youth Centre has evolved into what it is today. It was originally constructed to be a business/entrepreneurship centre, but it has become a designated space for youth. Originally there were only two staff members that provided drop-in and gym activities for youth. As it grew, other team members joined, providing various programs and services for youth. Today, in 2015, there is a staff of nine with a variety of programs, gym activities, dances, special events, the newly added Culture and Language worker/program, and the community radio station.

The Youth Centre has created a space where youth, if even for a short period, can liberate themselves from the chaos of their homes. Given that youth are assuming a lot more familial responsibility at early ages, children have to be adults earlier rather than later. This has disrupted the cycle of *pimatisiwin*. For this reason, life stage teachings and ceremonies are emerging out of the JDYC. The purpose and vision of the Director is to re-instill the cycle of life teachings that taught how to be a good and loving human and how to fit in the world. This project has helped to reintroduce this knowledge within a public, community-based setting.

The Director believes that in order to reverse the effects of residential schools and colonialism, it is important to make Cree traditions and knowledge available to the youth. The mainstream school does not provide such opportunities. With the effects of colonization, much of this knowledge exists in a gulf; people do not know where to access it. A prime example of this occurred during the second phase of the project.

Bridging the Gap

As part of the Milo Pimatisiwin project, the Youth Centre worked with

traditional knowledge keepers to give young parents the opportunity to have walking out ceremonies for their babies. The *pimatisiwin* teachings were traditionally practiced in Cree culture; each stage of life and development was marked with a rite of passage. The walking out ceremony is one of the first ceremonies for our people as they grow and develop as human beings. It is normally done when the baby is one year old. This is how they are introduced to the physical and spiritual world, and how their first year of life, and their parents, are honoured. It is a celebration of a young person's life. Their parents, grandparents, other family members, and friends all gather. Everyone acknowledges the child and expresses what they wish for the child as the child grows. A commitment is made to support the child through the next stage of life. The ceremony also acknowledges the hard work that parents and grandparents do for children to help them grow. The walking out ceremony that the Youth Centre assisted with gave many young parents the opportunity to offer this for their babies. Six babies had this rite of passage, with their parents and family members present. Over fifty people were in attendance that morning. The young parents had expressed that they wanted this done for their children. They knew it was important but did not understand why. They did not know what they needed to do and all that was involved. The JDYC was able to assist them and to bridge that gap.

The Omushkegowuk people are fortunate that it has a good core of people that have retained the Cree knowledge, knowledge that was forced into hiding due to our land-based practices being outlawed by the Indian Act. The mistrust of traditional Cree practices was ingrained into the older generations. The youth and younger ones know

that something is missing. They are starving for the knowledge that is their inherent right. Introducing them to their culture and helping strengthen their identity can help remedy the social problems that exist.

Filling Our Cree Cup

The Youth Services Director applies the analogy of a cup. Prior to contact, our Cree people had our own cup. It was filled with our traditional practices, connection to the land, spirituality, language, families' roles, and responsibilities—our Cree ways. The occidental systems that were enforced emptied that cup; they allowed for negative effects to enter and become normalized. This is the violence, alcohol, drugs, poor health choices, disconnection from the land and our traditional food (the practices of gathering and preparing), which compound themselves and manifest in numerous social problems: poor health, poverty, difficulties with the justice system (disproportionately high numbers of incarceration and crime rates), and violence against women and children. Our cup has been filled with too many things that either harm or do not serve us. Refilling our cup with what was taken is invaluable to our holistic wellbeing. It will provide our people and youth with a solid foundation for being a Cree person in the world today.

Youth have a unique circumstance in that they must learn who they are as Cree people in the contemporary Western world. Our youth and our people would benefit greatly from learning to walk in both worlds, and from understanding how their life circumstances came to be—that social conditions are the effects of -isms, including colonialism, racism, and sexism.

In order for this knowledge to be shared, and to counter the negative impact of colonization, we must make this information accessible in new formats. We must preserve what is quickly being lost, share this information, and learn to trust what our Cree ancestors lived by since time immemorial. Many of our traditional ways have been altered with the use of modern or Western tools. For example, the people hunt with guns, and travel on skidoos, boats with motors, helicopters, and trucks. The value and importance of the activities remain the same, with the added benefit of new tools. Sharing traditional knowledge using tools like the Internet, web apps, and radio can make it accessible to our youth—who are learning to use technology at a rate unprecedented in our history—as well as to a broader audience. Given that much of the Cree population has migrated, and that the majority of Indigenous people in Canada are moving to urban areas, access to knowledge and values is an important issue.

The Director of Youth Services has worked in a variety of areas, seeing and experiencing the impact of the loss of culture, identity, and connection to the land. The traditional Cree values that were once universally understood recognized the importance of instilling *pimatisiwin* teachings in the people to prepare and strengthen them, and to ensure that the children are equipped to be strong, healthy Cree beings. Normalizing these traditional practices and sharing the *pimatisiwin* teachings are vital to the survival of our Cree identity. It is felt that we need to ensure that they are accessible for all who want to learn, to heal, and to grow as human beings. We need to help people to “fill their cup” and develop an understanding of the current social context they live in and to apply the teachings in a contemporary context. The social

conditions that exist for Indigenous people today took many years to manifest. Their roots reach back as far as contact, before the creation of the Indian Act and residential schools. To have the teachings brought back will take many years. It is important to start today, with children and youth. One traditional healer stated that Cree people would use ceremonies (such as tent shaking, sweat lodge, sundance, and vision quests) to celebrate, honour, and give thanks for life, as well as to seek guidance. Today, they are used for healing from the damage of colonialism. Hopefully, in our future, our children and those yet to come will not need to heal from what has been lost.

The Milo Pimatisiwin Project: Lessons Learned

I relearned the importance of a helper's role. I did not come to this project with answers and solutions. The people have their own answers, solutions, and clear vision of how to create healthy living for their youth, families and community in general. I remembered the importance of unlearning in order to listen and to serve with what I had to offer. With shared accountability, there is trust.

—Cindy Gaudet, University of Ottawa student

The Cree concept of *milo pimatisiwin* can help us to weave a theoretical, epistemological, and methodological approach to inform youth programming, community leadership, and engaged research. Long-term vision, Elder and youth engagement, knowledge keepers, resources, and commitment are required to recreate *milo pimatisiwin* in a modern-day context. Collaboration between stakeholders is critical for the construction of an alternative conception of health and wellbeing, which has implications for land-based initiatives. We have organized the lessons learned according to three themes. This could lead to potential best practices, guiding

principles, and/or policy development.

Outsider-Insider Relationships

Within the context of this project, it was important for the authors not only to facilitate the project but to also live the *pimatisiwin* teachings. This helped us to understand and to confront our responsibility for the inadequate system that First Nations and Métis communities must work with and exist in. It was important to support one another in maintaining an appreciative attitude, taking care of ourselves, and not falling into deficit thinking, given the historical context of distrust in the community.

It is important that outsiders coming into the community take time to learn from and with the community. Grasping and empathizing with the concerns that contribute to the current social conditions are not easy. It is important to have one's own wellbeing bundle of knowledge and to seek support from the community and Elders. This can foster a deeper sense of cooperation and community spirit. Cultivating the teachings acquired through experience can uplift one's consciousness. This is vital in researcher-community engagement if we are to remain focused on a shared vision for the future.

Consistent three-way communication with the Moose Cree First Nation band council, the Centre for Global Engagement, and Cindy Gaudet as University of Ottawa student ensured a respectful process. Dialogue helped to shift power differentials while still maintaining an awareness of funding criteria and accountability, which defined the manner in which money was disbursed to the community and to the student. With a

relational approach, there is room for outsiders to assist in supporting the interests of the community, given the loss of trust from within the community. An outsider can be heard differently, as the Associate Director explained to the group. It is, however, important for the outsider, in this case a Métis researcher from another community, to be grounded in her own history, identity, and values. This knowing helped her to respect the differences in Cree values and ways of being. An Indigenous research methodology is vital to maintain a balance between being a helper/facilitator and being accountable to academic timelines, power differentials, and project deliverables.

Land-based initiatives

Indigenous thought wellbeing disrupts the Western ideology of health and wellbeing. Health is not separate from one's identity, therefore it does not fit within an ideology of individual responsibility and compartmentalized as separate from community wellbeing. Indigenous peoples' view of health goes further. According to the research and the Omushkego people's themselves, health and wellbeing have to do with the balance of relationships with land, identity, and family (Adelson, 2000; Anderson, 2011). Cree thought offers a renewed outlook on wellbeing for a diverse generation. Through our shared experience, we further suggest that *milo pimatisiwin* principles served to ground a collaborative health and wellbeing research project and initiative from within a Cree methodology.

Just as there is not only one way to spell *milo pimatisiwin*, neither is there only one way to live the good life. We learn that it was important in this process not to become dogmatic about what living and being well mean. This is a living concept, in

relationship with spirit. It ebbs and flows with the seasons of life, experiences, and the environment. There is rhythm that cannot always be followed with a schedule and clock. In other words, being flexible and gentle is important. The means to achieving the good life may be altered by time, resources and technology, but the values learned and practiced remain the same.

Elder & Youth Engagement

Reliance on Elders' wisdom, skills, and stories in land-based initiatives is essential for restoring the value of their role in, and responsibility to, community wellbeing and research initiatives. "To involve our Elders is how to bring change" (Darryl Dick, personal communication, August 2, 2014). There also needs to be an understanding that Elders are not Elders simply because they have reached a certain age. Some of the communities' Cree knowledge keepers are young yet possess a considerable amount of knowledge. That knowledge can come from anyone, including our youth and children, was one of our greatest teachings.

Reconnecting youth and Elders provides mutual benefits for each demographic. During the project there were many Elders who expressed that they enjoyed teaching the youth and longed for more such opportunities. These interactions provided both Elders and youth with a sense of belonging and purpose. The JDYC observed changes in attitudes among some "problem youth" after they spent several days on the land and water, learning from the Elders. The youth received guidance, praise, gentle teasing, and humour to create learning opportunities. It is important to consider what the Elders need to be well, and the protocol required to engage their services in

constructing land-based initiatives.

Discussion and Conclusion

This project has been a stepping-stone toward integrating local resources and land-based knowledge into community initiatives, within the growing application of Indigenous methodologies. The project process was guided by the JDYC Director, and by knowledge of the people who have learned from and lived with the land, as well as the people who are learning. The approach combined hands-on experiential and practical learning, teachings about life, and living in two worlds. We sought to weave several components: the emotional, spiritual, physical, and social. The project nurtured the foundations of Indigenous resurgence within the infrastructure of the JDYC. It brought forth the inclusion of many generations in fostering youth wellbeing.

The project temporarily disrupted the silos, not unique to Indigenous people, that are driven by a logic that can make it difficult to apply teachings, given the limited resources of youth and Elders and the barriers to accessing these resources. The study challenged the knowledge production of an outsider's gaze and created awareness-based Cree ways of seeing, and learning from, the knowledge that flows from their respective connection to the land. The re-centring of land-based initiatives at the JDYC offered a springboard from which to share and to retell intergenerational knowledge through modern technology, inclusive of academic institutions.

The Omushkego people, as with many Indigenous communities, are coming out of a long history of exploitative impositions and "we know better than you" attitudes (Brokenleg, 2012). There is continued fear and apprehension about activities that are

culturally relevant. This project has assisted in legitimizing the importance of the work that must come from within the communities themselves. The Omushkegowuk people have for decades been seeking to repair the damage caused by attempts to break down Cree culture. The Milo Pimatisiwin project is one of many collaborative initiatives designed to strengthen human relationships, connection to the land, and the continuity of cultural practices, values, and skills.

Chapter Six: Conclusion—Practicing Strength from Within

The aim of this study was to examine how an Indigenous research methodology helps us to recognize and to understand land-based initiatives as *milo pimatisiwin*. Guided by the Moose Cree First Nation community, I was exposed to the concept of the good life, *milo pimatisiwin*, and land-based initiatives that aim to reconnect youth to the land. Further, through this work I aimed to understand the perspective of health and wellbeing from an Indigenous perspective of connection to the land, and more specifically, in the context of the Moose Cree First Nation community. Indigenous research methodology, land-based initiatives, and *milo pimatisiwin* are distinct and yet interrelated. As a whole, they explain the importance of living in balance, through an understanding of the relationality of kin-based relations, reciprocity as expressed in *whakotowin*, and respect for individual experiences as central to the Métis and Cree way of being.

The idea of reconnecting to the land is not positioned in this study as simply going back to live on the land, in the traditional sense of being reliant exclusively on food and material sources from the land. Based on my research, I come to know the concept of *milo pimatisiwin* to characterize various inter-related elements of connection to the land. These elements embedded in land-based initiatives foster the wellbeing of both physical and spiritual life: the ability to hunt, trap, and fish in one's traditional territory; to be a skilled knower of one's own environment (for example, to read the puddles of water, to understand weather patterns, to read animal tracks, to know how to navigate the terrain, to recognize impacts of historical trauma); to know the history of Treaty 9; to apply Cree knowledge in a contemporary context, such as life stage

teachings and the reciprocal obligation of kinship systems; to know what it means to be *illewuk*, a Cree person, a human being; and to know one's relations and understand how they lived in the past. An Indigenous research methodology helps come to know the Cree concept of good life as embedded in land-based initiatives.

In this conclusion, I will summarize the four chapters that make up my dissertation and present a perspective grounded in a decolonizing approach to research. I will further include reflections on methodology, ways to strengthen research practices, the importance of further research on land-based initiatives, and developing our research from within.

Summary of Chapters

In the introductory chapter, I outlined the aim of the study, how I came to be in Moose Factory, and how this research study addresses key concerns raised by the community: youth wellbeing and the gap in knowledge transfer between generations. In Chapter One, I begin with an understanding of the Moose Cree First Nation as described in the literature and by the community themselves. I pointed out the importance of remembering that the history of Cree people in the James Bay region was traumatic for generations of families. The separation of children from their mothers, of adults from their distinct responsibilities and authority, and of the people from their land and food sources became more pronounced with the signing of the Treaty in 1905. Interactions with the Hudson's Bay Company, Treaty Commissioners, Indian agents, bible beaters, and residential school authorities (all of whom arrived on their own

initiative) quickly eroded a cohesive way of life that involved cooperation with the wisdom of the land, kin relations and with one another as means to survive.

I reviewed the literature on colonialism, settler-colonialism, decolonization, *milo pimatisiwin*, and land-based initiatives in order to situate my research in a historical, social, and cultural context with Moose Cree First Nation. This literature review and the community input further pointed to the differences between Western and Indigenous worldviews when responding to the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. I suggested that the Indigenous worldview of *milo pimatisiwin* plays a critical decolonizing role in Indigenous health research. A broader understanding of *milo pimatisiwin* as the good life reveals how land-based initiatives are part of Indigenous resurgence, political and cultural regeneration, or as the Director of the Youth Centre refers to it, “cultural revitalization”. This chapter clearly demonstrated that the land, connection to the land, and that land-based initiatives have been and continue to be a source of youth and community wellbeing.

In Chapter Two, I critically examined my experience of doing research with the Moose Cree First Nation community. This chapter answered the question of how participatory research re-inscribes or challenges dominant relations of power. As a result, the work of this chapter reshaped a participatory-based methodology into an Indigenous methodology, and therefore informed a Metis and Cree methodology of the visiting way. This process further informed my way of engaging with the community and the development of subsequent chapters and projects.

I included in this chapter my experience of learning by doing, and reflections on the importance of one's connection to the land when doing research in an Indigenous context. I began to formulate a new understanding of what participatory research could look like within a community setting. I did not know what "valuable" research was until I was there on the ground, until I listened, felt, and stopped to reflect. I learned specific ways of doing research from a Métis and Cree perspective, and began to question for whom such research is valuable and what purpose it serves. Applying methods that emerged from a specific place, and working to serve the interests of the community, became my research priorities. It further became evident that participating in research is also about participating in life. By this, I reiterate the teaching of leaving no part of ourselves behind.

In Chapter Three, I presented an Indigenous research methodology by drawing on literature, a Metis and Cree methodology and experience. In this chapter, I also situated myself within the context of an Indigenous approach to research. By doing so, I positioned myself as a researcher who not only looks to the other for knowledge, but looks at the cultural, historical, and social context of my own upbringing as a means to grow awareness beyond the confines of settler-colonialism. This informed my understanding of relationality and how the way of visiting could be applied to my research design. It also brought attention to the teachings from my own experience.

This Indigenous research methodology, specifically the visiting way or the way of visiting, helps us as researchers to be self-recognizing, and to understand how research is shaped by a cultural context, our personal experiences in the community,

going home, the guidance of Elders, and the role of Indigenous epistemology in research. The methodology of the visiting way helped me to go beyond a purely intellectual understanding of land-based initiatives as *milo pimatisiwin* to a process of coming to knowledge. This methodology in and of itself nurtures and regenerates life as it respects an Indigenous inquiry as a holistic and organic process. To have employed only a Western methodology and epistemological framework would have limited my capacity to recognize the good life as an intimate and holistic connection to the land, and to empathize with the influences that have altered the connection to the land. An Indigenous research methodology also provided a way to reflect and to better situate the research within a local context based on an Omushkego perspective of the value of land-based initiatives and the correlation to *milo pimatisiwin*.

Chapter Four, “Pimatisiwin: Women, Wellbeing and land-based initiatives for Youth,” presented the ways in which the Moose Cree First Nation is addressing their concerns related to youth wellbeing, the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, and the impact of reconnecting to the land. This chapter illustrated how methodology within an Indigenous context can be congruent with the ways in which land-based initiatives are governed: practical, experiential, participatory, and relational. The findings show that land-based initiatives provide learning spaces for intergenerational knowledge transmission, restoring kinship relations, the application of Cree methods, and Indigenous self-recognition.

Finding ways and adequate resources to develop new land-based initiatives, specifically for young women, was a priority for the community. Yet there were no

formalized land-based initiatives being designed for young women during my research study. The challenges of long-term funding, time commitment, change of lifestyle, and adequate resources remain concerns for the community. Additional research is needed to better understand how settler colonialism shapes these challenges, and influences the significance of gender-based knowledge within the context of Cree epistemology.

Although I discuss land-based initiatives more broadly, Chapter Four also focused on a particular Moose Cree land-based initiative known as Project George. We learned that Project George has grown from being a land-based program for at-risk boys and young men to being a more inclusive land-based initiative. I observed that these initiatives not only reclaim at-risk youth; they are decolonizing strategies that can provide spaces for relearning what it means to live and be well, for dialogue and humour between generations, for Omushkego-specific history and teachings, and for learning hunting and fishing skills and oral knowledge. Project George is one of the most celebrated programs in the community. Initiatives like Project George have the potential to put the community on a new trajectory, by this I mean ‘generations of active practitioners’ engaged in rebuilding and healing family and community. Accessing more fully the knowledge of the Omushkegowuk people themselves is paramount to the goal of fostering connection to the land, Cree identity, and family wellbeing. Engaging all the generations—youth, parents, women and Elders—strengthens these initiatives’ accessibility and knowledge base. Developing guiding principles, practices of safety, survival training, and methods of evaluation (based on

Cree values and priorities) can influence generations of self-reliance and community engagement.

The sustainability of land-based initiatives is not an unfamiliar issue to Indigenous peoples and neither are the colonial system that uphold short-term funding, lack of privilege, and cultural inferiority. For the community, finding the balance between community service and business components can be daunting. In terms of business, the community elaborated on the requirements of liability, legalities, licensing, administration, coordination, fundraising, staffing, financial sustainability, police checks, and health and safety regulations. Taking youth out on a fishing and camping trip is becoming less possible, given the high costs involved, the intensive physical labor, and requiring increased accountability to the Moose Cree Band Council and to the community more broadly. Accountability to the Band Council was discussed as a way to ensure transparency within the community; this was seen as a way to maintain good relations and trust. Managing both the business side and the goal of serving the community is not easy given the short-term nature of funding and the fact that there is only one person in charge. Land-based initiatives risk becoming overly bureaucratic exercises that place fences around the good life.

In Chapter Five, I presented a second land-based funded initiative emerging out of relationships formed with the community and funding from the University of Ottawa. Drawing on my understanding of relational accountability in research, I was motivated to seek out two funding opportunities with Students for Canada's North, with the intent to strengthen land-based initiatives out of the Moose Cree Youth Centre. This chapter

built on the cultural regeneration movement that draws strength from culturally-grounded land-based initiatives that come from the communities themselves. The Milo Pimatisiwin project can be considered within the methodology of participatory action research. Yet as a researcher, I quickly realized, as many Indigenous scholars have emphasized, that an Indigenous research methodology could better guide the research to foster *milo pimatisiwin* and to centre on Indigenous worldviews. It is not enough to go into the community to collect “data.” We have a responsibility to use our academic positions to facilitate and support the wellbeing priorities and approaches of our research partners that promote wellbeing. This project grew out of this awareness, and also what I heard from the youth themselves.

The Milo Pimatisiwin project’s objective was two-fold: a) address the gaps in thinking about health and wellbeing, highlighting the Cree concept of *milo pimatisiwin*, and b) bring the theory of *milo pimatisiwin* into practice. Further, it became important to highlight the dedication of community leadership committed to restoring culturally relevant practices of wellbeing. This demanding commitment requires self-sacrifice, determination, and community support, given the differing views on what constitutes “traditional Cree knowledge.” Simpson reminds her readers that vision alone is not enough; intent is required—“intent for transformation, intent for re-creation, and intent for resurgence” (Simpson, 2000, p. 147). Despite the serious challenges to running land-based initiatives, which is making them more difficult to experience, they remain testimonies of the very expression of how alternative knowledge can reinscribe value from within an O mushkego context.

Awareness of the sociocultural conditions that have ruptured the good life is growing with increased knowledge of the history of the Indian Residential School System. It is well known that the Indian Residential School System has modified roles, land-based practices, and community dynamics, weakening trust in Cree knowledge systems and trust of one another. The community knows that the land offers a context within which to strengthen Cree identity, foster traditional child-rearing practices, and promote family wellbeing. We found through a community-centred survey (inclusive of qualitative data) that the people felt it was necessary to foster Cree cultural knowledge out of their local Youth Centre. We interpreted this as a potential avenue to promote the diverse ways of achieving *milo pimatisiwin*. As a result of these findings, the Director of Youth Services has strengthened programming by integrating the transmission of cultural knowledge into the centre's long-term strategic plan and securing a full-time position to facilitate land-based activities. We have yet to see the results of culturally-specific evaluation processes and tools. Future research is needed to examine the viability of culturally-driven evaluations and whether these processes can shift Western notions of progress and success, and more importantly enhance the wellbeing of youth in a manner that is important to the community.

We have learned from Chapters Four and Five on land-based initiatives about the diverse ways in which the community is transmitting Cree knowledge—through radio airwaves, through youth programming, through collaborations, and through its vision of and desire for a different future for the children. Based on my experiences and conversations, I have interpreted land-based knowledge as being influenced by Cree

society, scientific knowledge, spirituality, environment, and culture. Learning from and with the land is a basis for fostering a sense of inter-dependence, intergenerational learning, and regaining authority over traditional territories by mobilizing activities on the land. The youth have expressed the importance of initiatives that reconnect them with the laws of the land, not only in legal terms but in terms of Cree customary governance systems that once ensured harmony and balance in their lives. Experiential learning was as important for the youth as it was for the community Elders. The youth needed to know why they were learning. The people involved in land-based initiatives reflected on the need to recognize what may seem obvious to them, or what they have taken for granted. The Cree method of learning by doing has been diluted by the influence of technology, drugs, and alcohol. I found an increasing awareness that those who have the old Cree knowledge and teachings need to explain the purposes behind what they do. This requires a transition for Elders accustomed to learning by doing. These are some of the changes that must be considered if the needs of youth are to be met.

Examining the success of land-based initiatives demonstrated the criticalness of drawing strength from local resources—from Omushkego perspectives, knowledge and community-specific methods for wellbeing. As well, it highlighted the value of integrated, cross-jurisdictional cooperation utilizing the resources and strengths of researchers, youth workers, health professionals, Elders, Band Council, and community-based advocates working together to decolonize and to solve complex questions related to youth wellbeing.

It is important to understand a decolonizing methodological process because it speaks to the complex systems that need to be in place in order to conduct Indigenous health research in a way that responds to the concerns of Indigenous peoples. This further provides context to the complexity of providing epistemologically relevant initiatives for Indigenous youth given the colonial structures (inner and outer) that systemically are built from deficit perspectives. With this in mind, the decolonizing framework I employed centers on the way of visiting to foster *milo pimatisiwin* – a way of life rooted in Indigenous resurgence. The land-based initiatives I learned about and was part of in this research do the same. For this reason, it remains important to think critically about methodology of not only research practices but for initiatives for Indigenous youth driven by external organizations that may not uphold a view of relational responsibility and the value of reconnecting to the land.

Methodological Reflections: Drawing Strength from the Teachings

Over the next few pages, I offer substantial methodological reflections, limitations, and recommendations on some of the poignant teachings that can inform future research processes. I learned from the community that the knowledge acquired by researchers rarely returns to the community. Likewise, researchers themselves rarely return. I had read the literature on the principles and tenets of both participatory research and Indigenous research methodology, but I learned from the community that a fullness of learning also requires one to be on the ground.

An Indigenous research methodology that involves decolonization and critical self-reflexivity has the potential to dispel imposed categories and the homogeneous

meanings of socially constructed terms such as Indigenous people, health, and wellbeing. I also found that beliefs and practices related to wellbeing varied between families and communities along James Bay, and even within the community of Moose Factory itself. This is also true of the Métis and Cree communities in Saskatchewan.

It became evident that researchers from other communities (whether urban or Indigenous) cannot and must not continue to apply a one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to working with Indigenous peoples. By approaching research from this mindset, we not only fail to enrich our lives by not recognizing the richness of distinctive theories, methods, and stories, but we also fail to inform Canadian citizens of the effects of the “unique” social disparities and colonial history of Indigenous peoples.

I elaborate on teachings because their methodological and epistemological contribution influenced this study and continues to shape my relationships. Teaching is a well-known concept among Indigenous peoples. Teachings are considered cultural knowledge that is passed on from generation to generation through stories, as well as spiritual lessons that emerge from one’s individual experience (Anderson, 2011; Simpson, 2000). Teachings are important to a relational view, and as research themes for Indigenous scholars. They are not stand-alone ideas. Teachings provide practical information that emphasizes cognitive and spiritual forces to foster a growing awareness of “communitism and respectful individualism” (Hart, 2010, p. 3). A sense of community is tied to kinship systems that include relationships of human to human, human to spirit, and human to nature. Respectful individualism is a way of being that fosters self-expression, freedom, and self-knowing. Teachings generate fluid stages of

consciousness that promote wholeness and interrelatedness, reflected in what Ermine (1995) refers to as “one’s inner and outer space.” Teachings reveal the discrepancies in our thinking and guide a decolonizing process, asserting worldviews which uphold a notion of truth as dependent on one’s experience.

The people helped me to navigate the waters of unknowing. I did not know the Omushkego people. I did not know (and still do not know) the Cree language. I did not know the history of Treaty 9. I did not know the community and its cultural dynamics. And I was not accustomed to life in a First Nations community—let alone Moose Factory, located on an island in an unfamiliar landscape. The list of “did not know” that I compiled delineated the limitations of my research, and this realization was a gift and a teaching to at least be humble enough to know what I did not know. I was also made aware of what I did know going into the community, such as always keeping in mind the three Rs: respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. But what did these even mean or look like within this specific context? The people themselves defined the terms of engagement, without ever directly saying so. I also did not know that the Cree way meant that I had to read between the lines, intuit, and figure things out by making mistakes and asking for help. Knowledge keepers would later tease me about my initial approach to gathering knowledge, which was clumsy and uptight.

All I knew was that I continued to experience discomfort with my research until I received the teachings. Once I gained this perspective, the process became less about what people were teaching me and more about learning from my own experiences. As long as I was fixated on the Moose Cree people, I would remain entangled in that which

I did not know. This would limit my inner and outer participation, and would contradict an Indigenous approach to research. Rather, I was asked to be receptive so that I could receive the teachings. Receptivity kept me connected both to the spirit of knowing (collective and individual) and to how it works simultaneously in one's inner and outer spaces. This form of self-recognition allowed for engagement grounded in principles of self-knowing, community values, and respectful conduct. Alternatively, the research experience would control and immobilize my presence in the community. These teachings gave me new instructions: to relax, and to visit as a way of relating. Going to peoples' homes, to their hunting camps, and to community events helped to ground my research in a socio-cultural context. The visiting methodology helped me to get off the fast-track of needing to collect data during my short times in the community, complete check-lists, and to avail myself of what remained to be seen and told. Being receptive to teachings is not always easy, but I learned that it was essential. It is becoming a way of life for me.

I became more at ease, not because of some orchestrated, contrived effort to know the meaning of connection to the land. The research experience improved because I was present. I was there, and at times it hurt to be there. Yet I chose to be there, to listen, to gather the teachings, and to employ a methodology from within. This meant remaining increasingly still when listening to stories of tragic loss due to the Horden Hall Indian Residential School, or the details about recent suicides in the community, or the youth sharing their personal life struggles. I could better relate to the efforts of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission, which have done extensive work gathering stories from Indian Residential School survivors (Spear, 2015). According to Sara Fryer, an Aboriginal Healing Foundation researcher, “the suffering breaks the listener’s heart, [yet] nothing seems as important as this work, the stories shared” (Fryer, 2014, p. 6). The Residential School stories of pain, courage, and resilience have recently started to be told in the community. These stories reveal what longs to be remembered and lived: the way of *milo pimatisiwin*.

My field notes became a useful research tool for acknowledging and processing the teachings. As an example, I realized how insecure I felt when I was disconnected from the land, from the roots of my home, and from my relatives, relying solely on my cognitive capacity to know. When I shared this with Maria Campbell, Métis Elder, she simply nodded. I recall sitting in her truck, feeling saddened that I did not know how what she meant by my needing “to go home.” Life was asking me to care deeply for a part of myself that hungered to be understood and to be home. Ultimately, this drove my need for connection and for validity from outside of myself. Being present to this appetite led me to examine Cree notions of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility based on a connection to the land. I had to find pleasure and be patient in the unscripted play of life. This is how I came to re-examine the meaning of respect, which led me to realize that I do not always need to initiate human connection.

The teaching of the interconnectivity of all life informed another way of approaching research. I became more relaxed, relinquishing the need to connect and build relationship. Rather, I applied what the people taught me by doing and their way

of being—that we are by nature connected. Connection does not require force; it requires presence and receptivity. This was my teaching of self-respect and respect for one another.

With this knowledge, I could better navigate the unknown terrain, feeling grounded and a little more aware of a living spirituality and my deep appreciation for diversity. In moments of uncertainty about the utility of this research, it would have been easier to have a manual and a checklist. Instead, the protocol was guided by a Cree ethos through stories, visiting, and sharing. I applied the “Cree ethic of conversation to take only what is needed and nothing more” (Michell, 2012, p. 7). Consistent check-ins with the knowledge keepers provided guidance, clarity, and reassurance. I also respected the fact that some older Cree people were not accessible to me. As one woman shared, they are still working underground, holding knowledge in a sacred way and not yet making it known to the outside world. I cherished this teaching. I felt deeply reassured in knowing that the older Cree people were protecting the sacred, and that the sacred was still very much at work.

As I mentioned earlier, dreams and ceremonies are also respected as a Cree way of coming to know. During the course of this study, Wapistan, shared a dream. He explained that he saw me picking berries and putting them into a basket. Each berry was knowledge. He did not know whether I was gathering the knowledge or filling the void. I responded with the suggestion that perhaps I was doing both. Another teaching I received in an interview—which became more like a ceremony, as the interviewee felt the ancestors were speaking through him—was to humble myself. This he repeated

three times: humble yourself, humble yourself, humble yourself. I did learn about humility; the Cree people showed me through their way of being with one another, and their intrinsic ability to partner with and to learn from the land and with the land. I came to understand that my concept of life was incomplete. This was my first step towards humility. Without the value of humility, I needed to know myself through the other. In discussing this awareness with Clayton Cheechoo, he shared that "humility is when you come to be thankful, because you want nothing and because you know you are already part of Creation" (personal communication with Clayton Cheechoo, August 4, 2015). This teaching shifts the perception towards you as another and not as the other.

The teachings were offered to me with consideration and sensitivity. The Omushkegowuk people were instrumental in shifting my perspective on what it means to be a participant in research, and what Margaret Kovach (2009, 2010) describes as the researcher-in-relation. To be a researcher-in-relation is to be a helper, to accompany, to be vulnerable and when possible to assist in obtaining resources for community-led initiatives. The concept of a helper contributes to an Indigenous understanding of methodology and engaged research practices (Hart, 2010). "Participatory" took on a new meaning, one of visiting, one of humility, one of social relations and one of having a voice. This type of commitment to research can be demanding for a researcher, as it is often perceived as going beyond the conventional research approach.

Ongoing exchanges with the research participants and with Métis Elder and

academic Maria Campbell provided spiritual grounding and focus. Vigilance is necessary in a terrain of differing worldviews—the white towers of academia, the community, and my own beliefs. Being asked whether I was an undercover cop was disconcerting but necessary. The need for critical self-reflexivity confirmed Maria Campbell's instructions to be grounded and to clearly articulate to those with whom I engaged in this research what knowledge I needed in order to do good work.

Reciprocity required looking within my own self, home, back yard, urban community, and family to search for that which I could not see, or more honestly, what I did not want to see. Maria urged me to go home, and I did. This was another step towards reciprocity and responsibility. In terms of my research with the Moose Cree First Nation, this ensured that I did not blur the lines of identity or promote the categorization of Indigenous peoples. My research would have done a disservice had I validated one particular form of Indigeneity and wellbeing over another. Although there are connections between the colonial history of Moose Factory and the Metis people of Saskatchewan, there are also differences to be respected.

I realize that as a young woman, it is sometimes difficult to come home to the murky politics that loiter within the spirit of Métis society. Coming home to a story and a song represents a triumph of that which has been nearly forgotten. A way of life—visiting—which at times feels distant, was regenerated within me through this research study. By going home to solicit stories of my family, I was able to empathize and to appreciate more deeply the Metis perspective, struggles, and methods of being well. By practicing strength from within, I could better listen to the stories with which I was

entrusted, and I could come to know the Cree worldview through their social, spiritual, cultural and historical context and not solely through my own. It was vital to have a basic understand of the Cree cosmology of life so as to not impose my concerns and further a western methodology to wellbeing.

The Limitations of an Indigenous Research Approach

Spiritual knowledge, which is difficult to comprehend through Western rationalism, is not easily discussed and understood. This of course does not mean that spiritual knowledge is unknowable from a rational perspective. Spiritual knowledge is often held deeply and quietly by Elders, as part of the language, in the body, and on the land. We may be hesitant to discuss matters of a spiritual nature due to our limited terminology or unfamiliarity with talking about what is held deep within. This sheds light on the compulsion to translate and categorize Indigenous epistemological thought into a Western context, as a means to legitimize its nature. In doing so, we risk situating what is deemed to be “traditional” in the past. It then becomes important to position Indigenous resurgence as a decolonizing process guided by Indigenous theories and methodologies that aim to disrupt coloniality of power, to restore youth and community wellbeing, to decolonize knowledge production, to heal and to reconstruct social relations, inclusive of Indigenous-Settler relations.

Inevitably, the institutionalization of knowledge impedes the progressive nature of Indigenous epistemological thought and further distances us from the spiritual knowledge nested within the everyday. Yet situating Indigenous epistemology in its own right to be can effectively disrupt Western thought and order, and can further help

us move beyond the disillusionment of difference, legitimacy, and progress. Attempting to understand Indigenous knowledge through western frames inevitably binds cultural resurgence in the realm of the colonizer/colonized binary further replicating the deficit thinking that points to “Indigenous problem”. Rather than validating this binary, a return the principles of *whakotowin* can hold ourselves responsible in a presence that colonial categorization cannot disregard. I am aware of the ambition of abandoning one-eye seeing marked by dominance and inequality. Yet we need additional perspectives on the process of fostering *milo pimatisiwin*. The challenge is to apply this process in our research, and to live it every day.

Recommendations to Strengthen Indigenous Research Practices

The Moose Cree First Nation Band was receptive to this research work in their community. Yet I heard a lot of grumbling about past and current researchers coming into the community. The Associate Executive Director and I discussed ways to increase community ownership and control over research as well as to assist researchers in understanding what is expected of them by the community. The possibility of renewing the Moose Cree Band Council Research Committee was proposed, as was developing formal contract agreements that would ensure that community conversations, questions, and processes are at the centre of research development. The challenges were time, resources, and finding community actors interested in outside research. I was not informed of any specific community research protocols nor specific populations in the community to work with. Although I interviewed and met diverse community members, my research results may have been more representative of

specific generations, groups, or institutions. The research could perhaps have been done more effectively if it had directly been done by the Moose Cree First Nation community itself. I am, however, aware that deeper research to address such issues as land claims, land-based planning, and an inquiry youth suicide is being conducted by the community itself.

This study builds on what living and being well mean from an Indigenous perspective. It does so by bringing in the concept of *milo pimatisiwin* to inform how research is conducted. Concretely, this means recognizing that Indigenous health research that is relevant for the Omushkegowuk needs to be distinct from Eurocentric approaches to health and wellbeing, and most likely different from research with other Indigenous peoples in Canada. My research aims to bring precision to the compelling need to effectively utilize Indigenous research methodologies as a means of enriching the lives of Indigenous peoples and coming to know land-based initiatives as *milo pimatisiwin*. This objective, inspired in relation with the community itself, gives general direction to my methodological inquiry. As I learned from the Omushkegowuk people, a Cree worldview is reflected in their land-based knowledge, language and teachings.

Growing Research on Land-based Initiatives

Indigenous research is valuable in terms of representing local knowledge and perspectives. Additional research is required to better understand the challenges that specific communities face in designing and implementing their respective land-based initiatives and programming specific for younger girls and women, as well as the challenges that Elders face in transmitting knowledge. I also increasingly became aware

of the conditions required for Elders to transmit their knowledge, given that many have suffered from Indian residential schools, some have health, economic and mobility challenges and some are busy caring for their grandchildren. More research is needed within the community to better understand the picture of Elders' remaining who has Omushkego knowledge and teachings, and the conditions that facilitate and obstruct Elders' participation in land-based initiatives. What are conditions are required to integrate visiting as methodology of knowledge transmission, and the dissemination of Cree cultural stories through the use of modern tools such as community-based applications?

Given the need to focus on land-based initiatives specific to young women, it will be important to find out from the young women themselves what knowledge, skills, and teachings they need to live and be well. What is the role of women-specific land-based initiatives in community wellbeing? What are the conditions that facilitate and hamper these initiatives? The voice of Indigenous youth in research is growing, but there remains a gap in the literature and in the community's response to generations of women's experiences of learning from and on the land. How do the youth apply land-based knowledge in a contemporary context? What tools or support is required to translate that which they have learned? How do young men and women see health and wellbeing differently? There is a need for deeper analysis, and strategies for community wellbeing that draw from young people's perspectives.

There is also a need to better understand how to reach youth who are isolated from the community and the Youth Centre. The community survey provided

information on some of the issues that prevent youth from accessing programming. The voices and experiences of youth can provide direction in addressing the struggles they face. In addition, their unique stories can refresh cultural methods so that traditions, and people, do not burn out or become stale. Such an outcome would be contrary to the philosophy of *milo pimatisiwin*.

More research is required to address the practical implications of health and wellbeing initiatives that are deeply entrenched in Western thought and conducted according to Western-based approaches to research. How are Indigenous communities integrating their own cultural knowledge in health and wellbeing professions? What are some of the challenges they face? What are some of the factors that have weakened the intergenerational transfer of knowledge about traditional food and food security? How has this impacted the role and wellbeing of women? What do women, mothers, and grandmothers need to be well? These are some of the questions that could be explored, given that the Moose Cree First Nation community is increasingly valuing and respecting land-based practices and knowledge as means to address the social challenges they face.

Growing from our Research

I grew through visiting, and so did the scope of this study. Being and participating in the community has brought me closer to the social issues that First Nations people face every single day. It has also brought me closer to the richness of the Cree peoples' values and culture. As well, I have felt closer to my own family and community and less trepidation about the responsibilities of my adult life stage. My

own perception of wellbeing changed. I have come to realize that there is much about Metis history, teachings and cultural knowledge that I do not know. I feel an urgency to come to know our stories.

This study has grown to encompass an attempt at better understanding the connection to the land that is ingrained or built into the people who lived and learned *milo pimatisiwin* from the land. I have felt, as many Indigenous people have expressed, that the stories, beliefs, and values of settler societies take up too much space, leaving little or no room for Indigenous methodologies and methods to take root. The state of Canada's social and political consciousness has reflected this (Erasmus, 2015; Saul, 2014). "Our European concepts of "voice" has [sic] been hedged with assumptions and undermined with problems" (Campbell, 2010, p. 7). An Indigenous research methodology of the visiting way invites a shift away from the external gaze, toward a reexamination of the perceived "Indigenous problem" and a critical look at the deficit-based thinking that upholds deeply-rooted colonial thinking (Regan 2010; Saul 2014). The land-based initiatives of the Moose Cree First Nation exemplify how their respective methodologies and methods are part of colonial dress. For this reason, funding sources need to move towards community-led land-based initiatives, which must be respected as viable approaches to fostering health and wellbeing in Indigenous Nations.

Much of my research study has relied on Indigenous scholarship, Omushkegowuk people, personal experience, and the land-based initiatives of the Moose Cree First Nation. This does not, however, represent a comprehensive inquiry

into *milo pimatisiwin*, connection to the land, wellbeing, or land-based knowledge given the limitations of my research inclusive of not knowing the Cree language. I have sought to focus on Indigenous research methodologies that would help our families and communities to practice strength from within a diversity of knowledge, perspectives, and teachings. There is far more literature written by Indigenous scholars available today than there was in 2007, when I was working toward my master's degree. This speaks to the wisdom of Elders, who knew that there would come a day when the people could no longer live off the land, and that getting educated in Western systems would become crucial for survival in the changing world. They knew there be a time when resources would be stretched, and when regulations would be imposed on the land. I heard this from a generation who went on to experience these changes. The increase of Indigenous literature reflects the prayers that were planted several generations ago.

Taking up space within Western institutions had become necessary to ensure we can make meaning for ourselves in the diversity of contexts in which we co-exist. I discuss this with some caution, so as not to replicate Eurocentric forms of governance, learning, and Indigeneity. This is a challenge that we face today as Indigenous peoples, because we have seen, lived, and been on the other side of oppressive mechanisms and attitudes that have harmed our relationships to ourselves, our families, our communities, and the land. For these reasons, it is increasingly important to develop theories, epistemologies, and methodologies that come from within. This can be a challenge given that we are still gathering our teachings, our stories, and our strength.

I relied on ongoing conversations with the community to ensure that the historical and community context and concepts were not only factual but that they reflected a perspective that came from the people. This was not easy, given the short amount of time I had in the community, and the small group of people that I was privileged to meet and get to know. It can take a long time, or very little time, to establish a rapport of being well together through visiting. There are various factors at play that direct open, trusting, and content relationships. Again, this is not a check-box, cookie-cutter approach to research, with a step-by-step guide to building relationships. Sociocultural context, cultural values, relationships, and reciprocal consciousness in our research matter.

I was fortunate to not only receive the book *Treaty No. 9* as a gift, but also to meet its author, the late John Long, a well-respected friend and historian in the James Bay area. Mr. Long helped to clarify some points and to ensure that I was not mixing Métis and Cree history from Saskatchewan with that of the James Bay region. There are similarities with the Plains Cree and Métis people from Saskatchewan, but, as he explained, there are also differences. This again reminded me of the importance of context, which being on the ground and being grounded can provide.

I hope that this study reminds us that Cree culture is not confined to a storybook notion of what it means to be an Omushkego or an Indigenous person. It is confined neither to the boundaries of the reservation system nor to socially constructed land-based initiatives. Culture is constantly regenerating its methods to respond to current needs. *Milo pimatisiwin*, what it means to live and be well, is intrinsically bound to

connection to the land. With this knowing, the aim of Indigenous notions of wellbeing is to maintain or to bring about balance - which brings into focus what is meant by "land" and "land-based" and its correlation to *milo pimatisiwin*. It is not a nostalgic notion of trying to living in the past. There are distinct lines that are arguably different from Western notions of health and wellbeing. These distinctions are in the value system, kinship relations, life stage knowledge and social interactions that nurture and value life, right-thinking, amusement, and inter-dependence. Historically, Canada has stolen many things from Indigenous peoples, but many things remain intact.

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Appendices

Appendix A: University of Ottawa Ethics Approval Notice

File Number: H10-11-08

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 02/09/2015



Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice Health Sciences and Science REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Alexandra	Arellano	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Principal Investigator
Allan	Downey	Others / Others	Co-investigator
Tanya	Forneris	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Co-investigator
Cindy	Gaudet	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Co-investigator
Jean	Harvey	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Co-investigator
Jared	Kope	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Co-investigator
Eric	MacIntosh	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Co-investigator
Julia	Porter	Others / Others	Other Collaborator
Terry	Swan	Others / Others	Other Collaborator
Tanya	Halsall	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Research Assistant
Ryan	Kyle	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Research Assistant
Sylvie	Roy	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Research Assistant

File Number: H10-11-08

Type of Project: Professor

Title: Building Sustainable Youth Development Sports Programs for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Populations

<u>Renewal Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</u>	<u>Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</u>	<u>Approval Type</u>
01/17/2015	01/18/2016	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

File Number: H10-11-08

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 02/09/2015



Université d'Ottawa **University of Ottawa**
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Special Conditions / Comments:

N/A

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2010) and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above named research project. Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the project, the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the project (e.g., change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, including consent and recruitment documentation, should be submitted to the Ethics Office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>.

Please submit an annual report to the Ethics Office four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval. To close the file, a final report must be submitted. These documents can be found at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Signature:

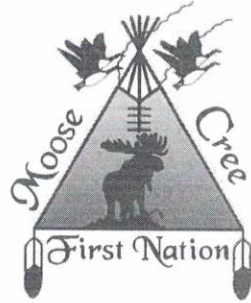
Mélanie Rioux

Ethics Coordinator

For Catherine Paquet, Director of the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

2

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MOOSE CREE FIRST NATION

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September 30th, , 2013

Alexandra Arellano (MNT 336)
School of Human Kinetics
Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Ottawa
125 University
Ottawa ON K1N 6N5

RE: Research Partnership on Land and Recreation Programming for First Nations Youth and Actions Paths Forward

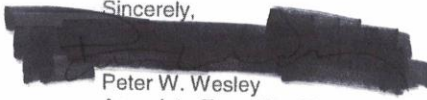
Dear Dr. Arellano,

We appreciate your visit to our community this summer and the discussions with our office regarding ongoing research opportunities. With this letter, I would like to confirm our interest in continuing a research partnership with the University of Ottawa and Moose Cree First Nation community.

We support and acknowledge the participation of one your PhD students, Cindy Gaudet, who expressed a particular interest in working with our community. We look forward to take part in her research proposal that focuses on stories of the land, intergenerational knowledge sharing and recreation programming (such as the PLAY program) for the youth of this community. We support her willingness to spend time in our community and to further interview community members based on the principles and ethics as set forth by the Aboriginal Research Advisory Committee. We are aware that this research project will lead to a PhD research thesis and further academic publications.

We look forward to ongoing discussion regarding this study and your presence in Moose Factory

Sincerely,


Peter W. Wesley
Associate Executive Director

c.c. Norm Hardisty Jr. - Chief, Moose Cree First Nation
Council - Moose Cree First Nation