

We are Still Dancing: Métis Women's Voices on Dance as a Restorative Praxis for
Wellbeing

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Dedication

I dedicate this paper to my little brother, Éric Armand Roy. It was your difficult yet uplifting story that encouraged me to complete this dissertation. May your memory live on through the spirit of my work and may it inspire hope in others.

Acknowledgements

Just as I pray every day, I first acknowledge those who give me the courage and the tenacity to complete all of life's journeys. I give thanks to my little brother who has gone on before me, my ancestors, the Great Spirit, and the Creator. Every day I ask for you to provide me with strength, especially in moments of great struggle. You were faithfully present as a reminder of why I had to go on—a reminder that I needed to remember all those who came before, those who will come next, and the necessity for them to hear what I have to say.

Throughout this process Jeanne Pelletier has been a mentor, a teacher, a friend, and a kookum to me. She understands that our work is ongoing and is grounded in the love and kinship that has grown out of what we have done together. You have inspired me in so many ways to do all that I was meant to do and be the strong Métis woman that I have become. You first taught me to dance, but most important you taught me to respect and love who I am, my roots, my culture, and my unique place on Mother Earth.

I knew Yvonne Chartrand's skilled experiences as a Métis traditional dancer would provide a unique voice to this study. After our initial conversation, I had an instant spiritual connection to her story, which mirrored mine in certain aspects. Her frank and open attitude has been a teaching to me in so many ways throughout this process. Much gratitude and love to her for her support throughout this entire endeavour.

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My mother and father have always allowed me to choose my own way, fully knowing my stubborn attitude would just go and do it anyway. They constantly mirror a pride and support of my accomplishments.

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The love of my life Dennis. He represents so much in my life, including a safe supportive space in moments of self-doubt and a loving environment to nurture my delicate emotions and endless passions. Thank you for keeping my head out of the clouds and my feet firmly planted on Mother Earth.

To all my teachers, friends and helpers in life. You are never far from my side always looking over me with your unwavering belief in my abilities.

Abstract

The purpose of this work is to center dance at the heart of Métis identity expressions, where reconnecting with who we are through dance is intimately grounded within an Indigenous understanding of restoring wellbeing. Exploring the experiences of four prominent Métis women allowed a space to celebrate the voice of dancers as they make sense of what it means to practice Métis dance within their lives. This research further focuses on the experiences of Métis dance as an understanding of Indigenous wellbeing. The lived experiences were collected and reviewed within an Indigenous research framework grounded in the Cree and Métis values of *Mino-pimatisiwin* (good life) and *Wahkotowin* (kinship) (Hart, 1999; Kelsey, 2008). Both concepts deeply inform the processes related to our reciprocal relationship to all things, living and non-living and further place emphasis on our shared responsibility to honour, respect and acknowledge Indigenous knowledge and its value to our communities. There were three findings that emerged from this study: Understanding Métis dance (1) as a restorative and relational praxis of self-knowing; 2) as intergenerational knowledge transfer; 3) as a site for growing cultural awareness and self esteem. The voices of the women celebrate Métis peoplehood through the restorative practice of dance and in doing so allow us to un-settle and re-center the notion of Métis identity and dispel the question of “authenticity” (Lawrence, 2003). These are our own personal stories to tell, and only we can rewrite them in a way that is beneficial and meaningful to us.

Keywords: Métis dance, Métis women, lived experiences, personal stories, identity, Métis knowledge, wellbeing, Indigenous knowledge, restorative praxis

Introduction

Research Purpose and Objectives

Métis dance, like most cultural expressions of the Métis people, is conceived through racialized narratives of hybridity that are overwhelmingly overshadowed by the concept of authenticity and essentialist notions of not-quite-Indigenusness. This research re-centers self-defined notions of what it means to be Métis, emphasizing Métis dance, personal stories, and peoplehood relationships (Andersen, 2014). By engaging with women Métis dancers' lived experiences, the purpose of this research is to explore Métis dance as a site for restorative praxis centred on relationship. This work puts dance at the heart of Métis identity expressions, where reconnecting with who we are through dance is intimately grounded within an Indigenous understanding of wellbeing.

The first objective of the research is therefore to celebrate the voices of women Métis dancers as they make sense of what it means to practice Métis dance. The second objective is to highlight how Métis dance can foster Indigenous notions of wellbeing. In order to achieve these objectives, I use a conversational method grounded in Indigenous methodologies that honours orality as intergenerational knowledge transmission (Kovach, 2010). I therefore position the personal stories of the dancers and of myself as a collaborative sharing process where the researcher is also a participant and where the relationship built within the conversations evokes culture, tradition, spirituality and political awareness (Kovach, 2010).

Wahkotowin (kinship) informs the understanding of our reciprocal relationship to all things, living and non-living. It places emphasis on our shared responsibility to respectfully honour and acknowledge Indigenous knowledge and its value to our communities (Kelsey, 2008). Situating *wahkotowin* within a research context, this relational responsibility can be

upheld through the act of sharing between researcher-researched. Wilson (2008) stated that the relationship between the storyteller and listener allows for each individual to “recognize the other’s role in shaping both the content and process” (p. 9). He further stated, “Indigenous people in Canada recognize that it is important for storytellers to impart their own life and experiences into the telling” (p. 32). Keeping in mind that story and knowing are ultimately intertwined, my focus will be on the significance of personal stories, as defined by Kovach (2010), as a form of knowledge transfer (Kovach, 2009). The conversational method was used to “evoke stories, our own and others” (Kovach, 2010, p. 47). The process of my data collection involved listening to and learning from the women’s personal stories about dance, and, more specifically, their teachings and values transmitted. By “visiting” with these women, I was also better able to reflect upon my personal relationship to myself and to dance, as well as on our shared processes throughout the journey of exploring what it means to live well for our people. I conclude that the power behind sharing our voices is of greater consequence than simply answering the identity question. It is by the telling of our experiences that we begin to shift and re-center the label of “mixedness” and in turn place emphasis on the voices of the Métis, which are focused on our peoplehood relationships, culture, land, histories and knowledge of the communities (Andersen, 2014).

Research Design

Métis Dance and Healing.

A study administered by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) suggested that “creative arts, culture, and healing are linked” (p. 1) and consequently are essential to the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing and health of Indigenous societies (Archibald & Dewar, 2010; Archibald, 2006; Anderson & Gold, 1998). Healing and wellbeing are closely connected to Indigenous knowledge systems, spirituality, and specific cultural values. It is through the learning and application of these systems that people are finding recovery from intergenerational trauma (Robbins & Dewar, 2011). The reclaiming of Indigenous knowledge and systems is aligned with a continuous movement urging Indigenous peoples to revitalize their cultural practices and to share their stories, knowledge and teachings as a method of healing (Iseke-Barnes, 2009; Lavallée, 2007; Castellano, Archibald & White, 2007). Leclair, Nicholson, and Elder Hartley (2003) believe that telling our own stories from our own perspectives as Métis is needed in order to strengthen the autonomy and our voices, and to retell history in a way other than what has been embedded in the “others” past telling for centuries. The telling of our personal dance stories is a positioning that serves the decolonization and healing process (Kovach, 2010). By reframing these personal stories, as these women and I have done, we challenge the imposition of Métis racialized discourses of mixedness. Rather than be plagued by a set story on who is and isn’t, we confront the erasure of Métis identity with our words and experiences.

For this very reason my research is grounded on an Indigenous research framework utilizing Métis and Cree worldviews and perspectives. This approach emphasizes the need

for Indigenous people to understand research from their own personal social contexts (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009). McDougall (2010) defends the use of methodologies and models that align worldviews and experiences of Indigenous communities, rather than perpetuate deficit theorizing and other colonizing lenses. For this reason, drawing on Indigenous methodologies allowed me to firmly situate reflexivity and the self as a site of meaning (Spry, 2001). Self-location and a horizontal relational approach between the researcher and the participants encouraged recognition of each participant's cultural diversity and gave voice to Métis and Cree co-created knowledge production (Kovach, 2009). Wilson (2008) writes that the use of specific Indigenous methodologies validates the use of methods in which Indigenous people gather, share, and build relationality (Wilson, 2008). In particular, in this research study, the conversational method was employed during visitation periods with all three women Métis dancers.

Data Collection Methods

Personal stories of lived experiences were collected through the use of a conversational method (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009). This particular approach is aligned with a relational Métis way of gathering, sharing, and teaching (Gabriel Dumont Institute, 1993). The conversational approach, also often known as visiting, is understood as an Indigenous method that is inherently relational: "by listening intently to one another, story as method elevates the research from an extractive exercise serving the fragmentation of knowledge to a holistic endeavour that situates research firmly within the nest of relationship" (Kovach, 2010, p. 99). Also, based on the principles of wahkotowin, visiting is a relational experience that provides us with an understanding of the interconnected

relationships we hold with all things, living and non-living (Campbell, 2007). I entered my data collection process honouring principles of wahkotowin and a relational protocol. The data set consisted of the collected lived experiences of three separate generations of experienced Métis women dancers, my own personal reflective field notes from these visitations, and experiences highlighting Elder personal stories and dance knowledge.

The final analysis revealed three emergent findings: Métis dance (1) as a restorative and relational praxis of self-knowing; 2) as intergenerational knowledge transfer; and 3) as a site for growing cultural awareness and self esteem. In summary, the end result was a dissertation set in sharing our individual and collective stories that in conclusion conveyed a singular message. Despite colonization and ongoing settler colonial subordination, Métis people have survived the ravages of time; our peoplehood is still alive and we are still dancing.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis is structured in the form of five chapters. From my positionality as a Métis scholar, chapter 1 introduces the author and her relations as part of the Indigenous methodology self location practice. This is my ancestral, personal, and cultural location as the primary researcher involved in this master's research.

Chapter 2 provides a brief discussion of the Métis people's history in Canada and the racialized identity questions. This chapter also provides a literature review of Indigenous approaches to wellbeing and healing through the arts, with an emphasis on Métis dance. The historical review in chapter two allows me to contextualize by geographically and

relationally situating Métis people (including myself) around the Batoche area of Saskatchewan. It also helps to make a connection between past events that have altered our experiences and understanding of identity in a contemporary setting (Hart, 1999). This chapter further explores the Indigenous notions of *Wahkotowin* and *Mino-pimatisiwin* in relation to the power of healing through creative arts, including dance, music, and community gatherings.

Chapter 3 is the methodological chapter that presents the Indigenous research framework I apply to my thesis and reviews the participants' background information and ethical considerations. Privileging personal stories within an Indigenous methodology centers a specific process of how we come to know and gather knowledge (Kovach, 2009). More important, it honours our knowledge gathering methods of sharing stories through conversations and visiting (Kovach, 2010; Leclair, Nicholson, and Elder Hartley, 2003).

Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study through analyzing the personal stories of the women Métis dancers. I review the data from conversations with Jeanne, Yvonne, and Jenel, as well as my own personal reflections and personal accounts. I elaborate on the three key findings. The discussion focuses on how we can better understand the concept of healing and wellbeing through the practice of dance as a site for restorative and relational praxis; the place to celebrate Elders' knowledge and its transfer within community dance practices; and how dance encourages cultural awareness and self esteem among youth and Métis dancers in general.

In Chapter 5, I conclude with thoughts on the continued challenges that Métis people face. I also elaborate the benefits of Métis traditional dance as an improved collaborative

understanding to Indigenous wellbeing. I suggest a need to promote diverse Métis cultural and creative programming that is inclusive of our Elders' knowledge and teachings, but that also honours their diverse skills, abilities, and contributions.

Chapter 1: Introducing the Author

I begin by introducing my name, its significance, and where I come from. This allows for self-location (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Kovach, 2009), which is an Indigenous way that I have come to know over time from my family, Elders, scholars, and mentors. This practice further emphasizes the need to decolonize ourselves on a geographical, genealogical, relational and personal level (Smith, 1999). Scholars such as Smith (1999), Absolon and Willett (2005), Kovach (2009) and Steinhaurer and Kurtz (2013) speak to the need for Indigenous researchers to position themselves in relation to the world, to the participants and to the study. Doing so, locating yourself, is to offer specific details on your history, your family, your homeland. This serves so that others may know of where you are from, to which they can then relate. By sharing these personal details you are encouraging mutual trust based on your relations and your connections. By locating myself and my ancestral connections to land and place, I decolonize research by creating a project that is rooted in my personal story and experience, as well as celebrating the voices of other Métis women.

In Cree, my spirit name is Meego Neepsee, which means Red Willow Woman. My French name is Sylvie Roy. I am primarily of Métis, Saulteaux, Cree, French, and Scottish descent. Red willow bark was and is often used by many Indigenous groups as a healing

medicine and pain reliever. My French name stands for forest. I was gifted my Spirit name by the late Gerry Prosper, a Cree Medicine man from One Arrow Reserve, Saskatchewan. It was here in his sweat lodge, not far from where I grew up, that I regained another piece of my being. Since then I have been continuously gaining new insights about the meaning of my names. My Spirit and French names enrich my personal connection to the land, to the trees, and to the forests. It is through these relationships with nature and Mother Earth that I am learning to understand my place within Creation. By sharing an account from my youth I am further able to draw on my personal relationship to my given names.

As children we were expected to play outdoors. Growing up in North Central Saskatchewan meant that the endless fields, bush, and forests became our playground. I was often found running barefoot through the tall grasses, riding horses through vast fields, foraging the forests for plants to build make-believe pies, and climbing trees as tall as buildings with my siblings. Clinging to those mighty branches I would lie about for hours, making friends with the birds while I listened to the wind rustle through the leaves. My sisters and I would build a tree house and imagine it was our home. It was here, sheltered amongst the confines of my Sacred Tree and enveloped by Mother Earth's tender creations, that I found security, belonging, and love.

Although I would not be gifted my Spirit Name until I was a young woman, it was apparent that my relational connection to the land and the trees was always present. I grew up on a farm in rural Saskatchewan between the towns of St. Louis and Bellevue, and not far from the National Historic Site of Batoche and One Arrow First Nation Reserve. My Métis ancestors made the journey from St. Laurent, Manitoba in the 1870s, and their subsequent

relatives all grew up on the same Saskatchewan soil near Batoche. We were raised to understand the rhythms of land and life. On my own and both my grandparents' farms we were expected to contribute to the responsibilities of raising animals, farming, gathering, and gardening, in order to sustain our family.

When I became of school age, I attended St. Isidore de Bellevue Catholic School from K-12. I did not know anything about being Métis, what the word Métis represented, or who the Métis were. I did not know about First Nation Cree people. I grew up French Canadian, attended a Francophone school and attended regular Catholic Francophone church. This is all a part of my identity. However, cultural identities evolve as did mine. As a young teenager I discovered what Métis meant, and who they were. From what I pieced together, we had Métis history in our family. My grandmother didn't talk about it nor did my mother or anyone for that matter. Although I grew up with very little knowledge of my Métis and cultural background, I cannot attest that it was missing. I may not have directly known it at the time, but eventually my Spirit would later bring me home to the truth. In order to better explain, it is imperative that I share my own history, as personal history is directly tied to a process of understanding one's past as a method for healing in the present (Hart, 1999). Oral history, research, and documentation have been shared in my family between numerous Elders, aunts, and cousins on the topic of our Métis history. Oral sharing is a way in which many Métis societies pass on information from one generation to the next (Payment, 2009). My "matante" M. recounts that it was my great-great-great grandmother, Josephte Lavalée, who first renounced her Métis identity after the loss at the Battle of Batoche in 1885. Historical research stated that the act of cultural denial, or the adopting of Western cultural

practices, was a survival mechanism employed by many Métis (Welsh, 1991; Payment, 2009, Lawrence, 2003).

At the time there were no specific schools for the Métis—only First Nation or Settler children. Therefore, many were sent to boarding schools (Leclair, Nicholson, and Elder Hartley, 2003). The act of claiming a primarily French heritage meant providing an education and a semblance of a way of life for her children. My great-grandmother also similarly claimed only French roots, although neither did she discredit the pride she felt towards her Indigenous heritage. The results of denying a Métis way of life meant that my own grandmother and mother also lived primarily within a French Catholic upbringing. My own personal reasoning for this is that my mother and grandmother did not directly share any ancestral information, stories, or practices with each other or with their children. Nonetheless, they, just as their Elders before them, were aware of their background and had a personal understanding of what it meant to be Métis in their own unique way.

Be that as it may, when I asked my mother about whether this was true, she confessed that she never knew what Métis meant, nor was it ever mentioned while she was growing up. My grandmother reiterates similar information, stating that she was never allowed to recognize her Indigenous heritage. Nor did they associate with First Nation or Métis people. At the age of 25 my mother discovered that she was Métis. Shortly after, she began working at the Batoche Historical Site and attending Métis Local meetings. Although I do vaguely recall attending some of these meetings and visiting her at work, I have no recollections of what any of it meant in relation to my own personal development or self identity, or if it was meant to mean anything at all. This does not deny the unconscious effect of being exposed to

theses experiences as a young girl. I was never without exposure to Indigenous knowledge and spiritual gifts.

One example is a memory of my Matante M. taking us into the bush or forest to seek out plant stems. I always enjoyed being amongst the trees, guided by my aunt. She would show us where to find them and how to look for the correct color, leaf shape, and root. After demonstrating how to delicately pull them from the earth, she would then show us how to peel away the skin on the stem to reveal the tasty medicine within. I was completely unaware at the time that these experiences were subconsciously forming a part of my relational experiences and contributing to the development of self. She said it was her own grandmother who had taught her how to seek out the plants and medicines.

I cannot tell you how it was that I identify with my Métis heritage and background. All that can remember is that I was about sixteen years of age. Around this time I was experiencing feelings of insecurity, self-doubt, and sadness. As I grew more aware of cultural differences, I began to see and experience racial discrimination towards First Nation and Métis people, both within my family and within society. A common thread was the racialization of Métis and their identity, neither accepted as white nor native, but a mixed labelling (Andersen, 2014). In addition, I grew up in a town that maintained prejudiced views on Indigenous ways of life and people (Payment, 2009). This brought up feelings of uncertainty, confusion and anger. It was easy to blame the Catholic Church for what I was experiencing. For these reasons and many more, it was easy to overlook something I never understood.

As a teenager I often faced a quiet restlessness within myself, a burgeoning question about my belonging and my background. My gifted privilege was a disguised burden, as I unconsciously carried the sorrow, the shame, the trauma, and the anger that this confusion had had on my family. To say that these feelings were directly related to this identity confusion I cannot know for sure. Notwithstanding, I can attest that these emotions and this confusion would play out in many painful and traumatic scenarios in my life until I enrolled in SUNTEP (Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program). It was here that I unearthed a deep, rich, and vibrant Métis familial, relational, and historical narrative. I discovered a part of my story that had been waiting for me to reclaim, and that had in fact never been lost. I was submerged in my personal ancestral history and became exposed to Métis and Cree worldviews, practices, ceremonies, relational and cultural values. It was where I met Elder Jeanne Pelletier and where I learned to dance. Through my relationship to Jeanne, through her teachings, and through dance, I was able to slowly mend a small part of my confused being. Besides providing a space to belong within a community, the act of Métis dancing embodied a ceremonial and creative expression that could only be described as a spiritual awakening. It was this spiritual awakening that encouraged me to open my heart and to find my way back home. This is my story. It is not a perfect one. However, it is the only one I have to tell, and I choose to share it in my own voice. This work has been greatly inspired by my personal struggles of self-discovery, by the forgiveness of what we cannot change, and by the constant challenge of finding our healing path home. When I was accepted into an MA program at the University of Ottawa, I knew that I would explore the contribution of Indigenous knowledge and stories as a healing restorative process. However,

I was unaware that the pursuit of my research objectives would be a subjective one, interwoven with my personal experiences, perspectives, and ideas (Graveline, 1998).

The completion of this MA was not without struggle. I was often left writing from a place of uncertainty. Caught between a dual paradigmatic reality, I often experienced a return to the confusing state of my youth. Overcoming the emotional rigour that is involved with balancing Western academic expectations with Indigenous consciousness was something I struggled with daily. Nevertheless, I can admit that all of these personal experiences have influenced my life on many levels and have supported the courageous process of discovering my voice. Weaver (2001) and Radu, House and Pashagumskum (2014) explained that the act of healing is a continuous process where you are expected to constantly renegotiate what culture and identity mean in your life. I have done so by re-evaluating not what others believe my identity is to be, but what it means to me to be Métis and to belong to a people. In the end, this process has not been an individualistic one. Rather, it has been continuously developed and fostered through my many relationships, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. It was the support of my family, my community in Regina, and my relationship to Jeanne and to Métis dancing that has encouraged me to share my story, to listen to others stories and to explore the infinite boundaries of our combined journey. All of these combined experiences and discoveries allowed me to ground myself, to expand my consciousness, and to examine what it meant for me to be a French Métis woman in a very different and contemporary time.

On a more thoughtful level, this work allowed me to adopt a critical outlook on the experiences of my mother, my grandmother, and my ancestors. I became better equipped to

understand the circumstances that had led to my need to find a healing path. Furthermore, it has allowed me as an adult to gain a new respect for my French Canadian heritage, rather than place blame on the confusion of my youth. Admittedly, to simply say that discovering something to connect with allowed me to regain a semblance of my identity and erased all feelings of confusion would be untrue. My own truth was that I needed to reclaim an understanding of Métis heritage for myself in order to contextualize my stories and to understand my own history before I could find forgiveness for past events. With the help of mentors, community members, and Elders, I was able to find spiritual guidance and strength to go forward. They provided me with the support to continue on the path of self-exploration. A few ways in which I continue to explore is through my spirituality, by spending time with my teachers, and by dancing.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Historical Background

In the following section I will briefly overview the history of the Métis people and some of the effects that colonization had on Indigenous peoples, their practices, and identity. In addition, I describe the role of Métis dance and social gatherings as having a direct relationship to the wellbeing of the people. I will also situate the notions of Indigenous well being and healing through the Cree and Métis values of Mino-Pimatisiwin and Wahkotowin. This will be followed by a review of scholarly research on the contemporary role of healing through creative cultural arts, including dance.

Who are the Métis?

Below I offer a general, albeit narrow, description of Métis origins, their cultural practices, and historical information. Since the 1982 Constitution Act was enacted, Métis people have been recognized as one of the three Indigenous groups in Canada (Kumar & Janz, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2008; Payment, 2009). Prevalent historical accounts state that the Métis people originated from the arrival of European voyageurs during the 19th century fur trade era (Brown, 1993; Edge & McCallum, 2006). As part of the trading experience, voyageurs from the Hudson Bay Company and North West Company would form intimate relationships with the local Indigenous women, mostly Cree and Ojibwe (Bakker, 1996; Welsh, 1991). The children born from these unions formed the Métis people and communities (Edge & McCallum, 2006; McDougall, 2010).

From here on, the people quickly forged themselves a unique culture and identity, with their own languages, music, dances, values, and food (Prefontaine & Barkwell, 2006). The geographical distribution of Saskatchewan's Métis is diverse. Their social, cultural, and economic practices depended on their specific region and those with whom they developed kinship relationships (McDougall, 2010). Many first generation Métis in Saskatchewan intermarried and settled down in the Île La Crosse area. There are also many settlements throughout the province (St-Onge & Podruchny, 2012). My ancestral Métis roots originated from St. Laurent, Manitoba and in the 1870's many of my ancestors made their way over to settle on farming communities near and around Batoche, St. Louis and Duck Lake, Saskatchewan. The Métis women of Batoche were mostly of Cree, Ojibwa, and/or French Canadian descent (Payment, 1986). Batoche is most commonly and historically known in

dominant discourses for Louis Riel, the political resistances of the late 19th century, and the violent encounter of the Northwest Rebellion of 1885. After the war of 1885, the women suffered more than the loss of their men. Many were widowed and left with large families to care for, and dispossessed of their homes and personal belongings (Payment, 1986).

Métis children were put into orphanages and provincially-run boarding schools, my great-grandmother being one of them (Leclair, Nicholson, & Elder Hartley, 2003). This was an assimilationist practice, organized by the Canadian government and Christian churches to indoctrinate Indigenous people “in the ways of mainstream Canadian society” (Chansonneuve, 2005, p. 33). Although many Métis customs and practices reflected French-Canadian traditions, there were still traces of Indigenous culture found within their languages, mentality and religious beliefs (Payment, 1986). McDougall (2010) recounted that although the Ile La Crosse’s local missionaries frowned upon dance gatherings, socializing, and drinking, the practices remained. In 1892, Chief Trader Moberly was accused of placing Métis socio-cultural traditions ahead of the church’s pursuits of cultivation. Moberly responded by stating that “the HalfBreeds of this place always did and always will dance in spite of the Priests orders” (McDougall, 2010). Moberly allowed them to host dancing, as it was attached to the people’s economic wellbeing and made up a part of their social foundation. This quote attests to the resiliency of the Métis and further demonstrates the relational connection and strength between familial ties, social gatherings, dancing and wellbeing.

The Identity Question

There is a thorough and complex scholarly literature examining the processes of Métis identity formation and the origins and key factors at the heart of this “New Nation” consciousness (O’Toole, 2013). For example, political history or fur trade historiography center the historical founding moment known as the battle of Seven Oaks, as catalyst of a national Métis self-awareness (Morton, 78; Stanley, 1961). Other works locate the crystallization of Métis identity beyond the fur trade war, in class structures, institutions and occupational niches (O’Toole, 2013; Brown, 1987). But overall, the ethnogenesis reading essentialized the Métis distinctiveness within dual accounts of mixed-ancestry and hybridity (Peterson, 1982), where racialized and biological interpretations dominate identity formation. Similarly, Lawrence (2003) suggested that settler governments were responsible for such definition of an Indigenous identity. The Indian Act was created over a century ago as a colonial legislative act in order to assimilate Indigenous people, which also provided federal legislation defining and categorizing Indigenous identity (Lawrence, 2003).

In this thesis, I follow Andersen’s insistence to unsettle and reject the Métis identity founded on mixedness and racialized narratives of hybridity, in order to emphasize people’s culture, land, events, histories of the communities and peoplehood relationships (Andersen, 2014). Based on the premise that all Indigenous peoples are hybrid, scholars and institutions must de-emphasize the racialization discourse that remains at the core of Métis identity consciousness. For Andersen (2014), this “hybrid off-shoot of two races” (p. 6) is at the heart of shape shifting forms of colonialism (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005), serving postcolonial politics of recognition while maintaining an epistemological gap disabling Indigenous self-identification and peoplehood (Andersen, 2014; Coulthard, 2014). In other words, this

imposed hybrid vision of Métis identity has served settler colonialism, “through which administrators have attempted to usurp all the Indigenous territories upon which colonial nation-states such as Canada have been produced and legitimated and Indigenous peoples displaced and dispossessed” (Andersen, 2014, p.10-11). Accordingly, the whole logic of identity recognition in Canada is based on blood quantum, “a fictional concept based on racist ideologies about what makes someone ‘Indian’ for legal purposes” (Palmater, 2016). Indigenous authenticity is therefore understood in terms of a “mythologized, pre-contact past” (Andersen, 2014, p. 12), which makes the racialized mixedness of an imposed Métis identity essentially inauthentic. As MacDougall (2012) explains, rooting the Métis identity in biological mixedness “negate[s] the stories of families, the histories of our communities, and the authenticity of our aboriginality, reducing us to an in-between, incomplete, ‘not-quite-people’ who are stuck somewhere outside of the discourse” (p. 511). This classification leads to this “not-quite-Aboriginal-ness”, where the settler’s racial ontologies are ordering our legitimacy as an Indigenous people (Andersen 2014, p. 36). This thesis challenges the settler’s quest for authenticity and purity where cultural manifestations of such imposed mixedness render Métis dance “inauthentic” and not-quite-Indigenous. I am Métis and my work in this thesis emphasizes the resiliency of stories, dance and personal experiences that in turn celebrates the culture, dreams and histories representing Métis people.

Telling Our Stories as Survival

It is true that many of the stories have been fragmented and forgotten, and that documented records have been lost or were difficult to locate (Leclair, Nicholson, & Elder Hartley, 2003). Many of the historical reports captured others’ patriarchal telling, rather than

the voice of the people. Payment's work however has provided an appropriately detailed historical understanding of the Métis communities of Batoche from 1870–1930. Payment's (1996) *La Vie En Rose* focused in great detail on the ever-changing landscape that challenged Métis women's lives in Batoche before, during, and after the Rebellion of 1885. One of the methods through which Payment gathered sources was working with Métis local Elders and storytellers. Her relationship with the people informed her work, recounting the history of Batoche from the Métis perspective.

In contemporary times, Leclair, Nicholson, and Elder Hartley (2003) similarly explained that many Métis continue to live out “the patriarchal legacy of a colonial past” (p. 62). Colonialism continues to be faced, as many Métis people are confronted by the discrimination, racism and barriers to political and social equality that remain (Leclair, Nicholson, & Elder Hartley, 2003). With this in mind, Elder Hartley speaks of the necessity to collect and preserve our collective and individual stories in order to recapture the resiliency of Métis people, share our distinct Indigenous knowledge, and dispel the question of “authenticity”. As it is so, we have observed since the 1980s a noticeable surge of Métis people expressing interest, asking questions, and seeking out answers in order to make sense of their history and to better understand who they are (Payment, 2009). The contemporary stories confirm that the Métis are alive and well (Leclair, Nicholson, & Elder Hartley, 2003). As in historical, socio-cultural accounts, the people maintain a flourishing lifestyle through the act of sharing stories, ceremonies, creative artistic practices, and social dance gatherings and community events. Thus, this thesis let the stories speak for themselves. It is the sharing of lived experiences that reflect as true testament to the historical revival and continued lifestyle of Métis dancing.

A Way of Life: Métis Gathering, Sharing, and Dancing

Historical accounts show that the Métis were well known for their distinct music and dance practices (Kumar & Janz, 2010; Chansonneuve, 2005; Gabriel Dumont Institute, 1993). Traditional dances were held as a form of entertainment for the Métis, but also as a way to maintain relationship and ties with the neighbouring communities and relatives (Anderson, 2011; Whidden, Hourie & Barkwell, 2006). These social settings were a space for song, dance, and community engagement to take place (Anderson, 2000). Métis Legacy II was created along with Elder accounts, Métis community, and scholar input as a resource highlighting Michif worldviews and culture. Dancing and music was and continues to be inseparably connected to the Métis culture and ways of being (Whidden, Hourie & Barkwell, 2006). One Elder shares her experiences of going to dances: “when there was a wedding, we went with our parents. It was healthy. It was fun” (Anderson, 2011). Campbell (cited in Anderson, 2011) illustrated the dances in her community as a traditional event that was celebrated amongst everyone.

Sylvia is a Métis Elder who lived in Northern Manitoba. She explained that her father was a fiddler, and that during the holidays the people would hold a dance every night (cited in Anderson, 2011). She also mentioned that they would always bring the children along to these gatherings. Métis Elder Medline Bird defined these dances as a gathering where people “sang, danced in a circle, often held hands and told stories. The dances also involved sharing” (as cited in Whidden, Hourie & Barkwell, 2006, p. 172). Oral accounts and testimonies confirm that Elders passed down Métis traditional practices such as dance onto the younger generations (Payment, 2009). Often the dance gatherings and socials were where the young

would learn from the old. It was often the only form of entertainment, and children would always attend gatherings, events, or weddings along with their parents. Similarly, Anderson (2011) explained that the dances provided a fun, healthy experience but also reflected the importance of “intergenerational exchange of community and relationship building” (p. 117). Storytelling, art, and music were also common practices at community gatherings and highlight how the dance gatherings were central to Métis ways of being (Gabriel Dumont Institute, 1993; Bakker, 1996; Mcdougall, 2010). Today, the dances are used in a way that honours the stories of our past and also highlights the continued revitalization of Métis cultural practices (Gilchrist, 2008).

The valuable nature of Métis dance gatherings plays a direct role in understanding the process of healing and wellbeing. When dancing in a community gathering, individuals are engaged in, but not limited to, a supportive social environment, the development of personal skills, expressions of personality, strengthening of relationships, and connecting to culture and spirit (Castellano, 2006; Archibald & Dewar, 2010). Life, health, and healing are fostered through the building of positive relationships and through the acknowledgment of the values of respect and relationality. These values are maintained through transfer of Elder and adult teachings to the younger generation (Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014). Furthermore, the support of Elder and community engagement is known to foster belonging and to strengthen self esteem in youth and children (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Bockern, 1990). There is literature on the role of both Indigenous and Western creative arts in healing and wellbeing, as I will show in the following section. Despite this, there is a gap in the research concerning the specific contribution of Métis dance experiences as a way to understand wellbeing. Additionally, there is a need for literature on the topic of Métis

dancing as a specific form of knowledge connected to our processes of self-discovery and healing.

Acknowledging Historical Trauma and Healing

In order to better understand the concept of healing, I will describe some of the relevant literature on the effects of colonialism, historical trauma, Indigenous healing, and wellbeing. It is well documented that many First Nation and Métis have withstood traumatic historical events such as colonization, warfare, famine, and negative residential school experiences (Castellano, Archibald & White 2007; Chartrand, Logan & Daniels, 2006; Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003; Fiola, 2015). Historic trauma is defined as the “long inventory of losses experienced by Aboriginal people under colonization—from the loss of lands, resources, and political autonomy to the undermining of cultures, traditions, languages, and spirituality” (Archibald, 2012, p. 17). Colonization attacked the people’s spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental wellbeing (Hart, 1999; Chandler & Lalonde, 2008; Fiola, 2015). Furthermore, these assimilatory strategies often meant the suppression of Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of living (Dion, Stout & Kipling, 2003; Hunter, Logan, Goulet & Barton, 2006). Historical accounts stated that “Aboriginal gatherings and activities such as feasts, give-aways, singing and dancing [were] deemed sinful and [were] stopped when witnessed” (Hart, 1999). Although many Indigenous people today have not directly experienced these trials and tribulations, colonialism continues to be felt in a multitude of ways, including marginalization of belief systems, the struggle for autonomous representation, lateral violence, racism, and high suicide rates (Maracle, 1996; Chandler & Lalonde, 2008; Edge & McCallum, 2006; Hart, 2010).

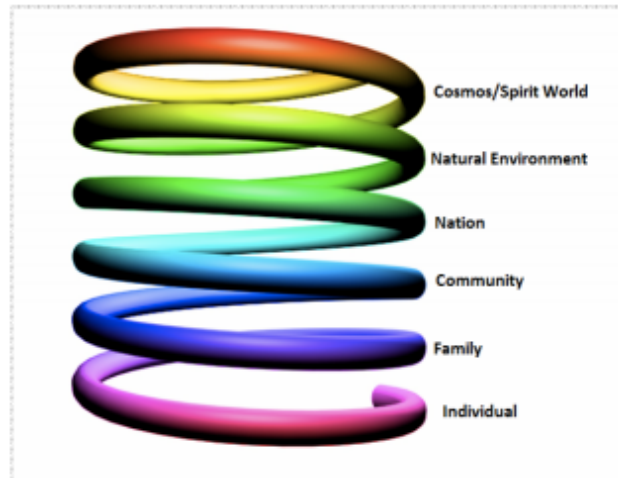
Social inequities and limited autonomy make up a contemporary struggle around health for many First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people today (Adelson, 2005). Métis participants from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Northwest Territories came together at the Métis Elders Gathering in order to discuss similar challenging issues. The gathering highlighted a need to revitalize, protect, and use traditional knowledge and healing practices as contributors to Métis health and wellness. Many of the participants shared stories and common experiences related to colonization, residential schools, loss of identity, land, rights, language, violence, death, and more (Edge & McCallum, 2006). All of these losses, according the gathered Elders, are known to impact the “mental physical, spiritual, emotional and social aspects of the health and wellness of the Métis today” (Edge & McCallum, 2006, p. 92-93). Recognizing the need for healing, the gathering was focused on centering Métis perspectives on health and improved practices for the wellbeing of all. There are ample studies exemplifying the social realities of Indigenous people, and we have therefore seen a resurgence of research focused on healing and wellbeing (Archibald & Dewar, 2010; Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003).

Restoring Balance and Healing

This section focuses on the emergence of cultural healing practices and recognizing the significance of Indigenous knowledge and learning as contributors to wellbeing (Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003; Manitowabi & Shawande, 2011).

Adelson (2000) described healing and wellbeing from a *Whapmagoostui* Cree perspective as inseparable from our cultural norms and unavoidably attached to our historical experiences. Adelson (2000) described the history of the *Whapmagoostui* as fundamental to

making sense of the relationship between identity and wellbeing. Their conceptual understanding of “being alive well” is inextricably bound to the land, health, and identity (Adelson, 2000; Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014). For the Cree, the concepts of health and healing go beyond the physical body and encompass the “practices of daily living and balance of human relationships” (Adelson, 2000, p. 15). Many Métis perspectives on health are centred on similar perspectives. According to McDougall (2010), the lives of the Plains-based Métis in Ile La Crosse were organized in “relation to one another or in relation to their land ... they established and developed a system of values and then used economic institutions to support and facilitate the perpetuation of those values” (p. 439). Archibald and Dewar (2012) similarly explained that healing is understood as the restoration of balance. More specific, restoring balance is determined by an individual’s relationship to the natural world, culture, spiritual identity, language, family, community, and nation. Healing requires a need of supportive social and economic environments (Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014; Adelson, 2000). Hill (2009) and Hart (1999) discuss the benefits of using Indigenous health approaches specific to the individual’s and community’s worldviews, values, and knowledge. Using health approaches that are aligned with Indigenous perspectives on wellbeing can create resiliency through autonomous community practices (Laboucane-Benson, Gibson, Benson & Miller, 2012). As such, Laboucane-Benson, Gibson, Benson & Miller (2012) used a symbolic spiral to demonstrate the representation of the Cree Interconnected worldview between the spirit world, natural environment, nation, community, family, and individual. When our relationships live in harmony and balance, between all components in the spiral, then *mino-pimatisiwin* can be attained.



Robbins and Dewar (2011) support this claim and further stated that when there is weakness within any of these components, an individual or community may become unbalanced. In relation to both literary works, there are many studies demonstrating the benefits to Indigenous communities in revitalizing their cultural practices and honouring their distinct knowledge systems and ways of living, in order to regain balance and to find spiritual healing (Manitowabi & Shawande 2011; Hunter, Logan, Goulet & Barton, 2006; Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003). Robbins and Dewar (2011) spoke to how Indigenous knowledge systems and spirituality are closely interconnected with healing. According to Chasasibi Elders, the “land and cultural traditions have healing power that can enable individuals in distress to deal with pain and self-hurt” (Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014, p. 87).

Hunter et al. (2006) found that there were three major contributors to healing and wellbeing: following a cultural path, gaining balance, and sharing in the circle of life. The authors described how regaining culture through traditional ceremonies, teachings, and practices allowed for the participants to renew relationships and to find comfort and balance.

Hunter et al. (2006) observed that healing was tied to cultural sharing within familial relationships, thus furthering our understanding of one way in which we develop balance between the four holistic states. Cultural sharing makes up a distinct part of the circle of life. The act of sharing was seen as a continuous process in which knowledge was passed to the next generation, often by Elders (Hart, 2002). One way in which cultural sharing took place was through the oral telling of stories. Many Cree societies use story-telling as a way to pass on value systems and worldviews to the younger generation (Bakker, 1996). Furthermore, sharing brought attention to the value of reciprocity, respect, Indigenous background and identity, and being able to engage with others beyond community.

Role of Elders

Elders have maintained ancient teachings that help us to understand a holistic approach to the world that we live in and to one another (Hart, 1999). Elders are individuals who are respected within the community and who possess an aptitude for passing on Indigenous knowledge, culture, and experiences related to the land (Hart, 2002; Robbins & Dewar 2011). That which they share teaches us about our relationship to the land, to our ancestors, and to our practices. All of these contribute to reaching and living *mino-pimatisiwin*. Furthermore, our Elders help us relate to our own personal identity and experiences as Métis people.

Restoring Balance Through a *Mino-pimatisiwin*

“We are a circle of women who support, educate and empower our women.

We acknowledge the Creator and the holistic relationship between the Earth

and the gifts provided to us. Through reciprocity and the healing journey, we can help our people reclaim and celebrate our cultures, histories and identities.” (Métis Women’s Circle, 1999)

Simpson (2001) explained that Indigenous peoples have their own ways in which they generate and understand knowledge from their own perspectives. Conducting research with Indigenous peoples and communities requires relevant worldviews and realities to be valued throughout the entire experience (Baskin, 2005). Wilson (2008) similarly claimed that, from an Indigenous perspective, reality is constructed by “our cultural, gender, social and other values” (p. 36). Considering this, the “good life” (or *mino-pimatisiwin* in the Cree language) is defined as a foundational concept for understanding reality, the world, and our place within it (Laboucane-Benson, Gibson, Benson & Miller, 2012). These realities provide a usable knowledge base as foundation for Indigenous scholars and communities to build and develop research inquiries and projects (Simpson, 2001). This knowledge or worldview, informs the ways in which people understand, philosophize, and perceive the societal surroundings they find themselves in (Te Ahukaramū [Royal] et al., 2002; Hart, 2010; Kelsey, 2008). Worldviews are “developed throughout a person’s lifetime through socialization and social interaction ... yet they are usually unconsciously and uncritically taken for granted as the way things are” (Hart, 2010, p. 2). On the whole, a worldview is composed of Indigenous knowledge as well the customs and traditions that guide it (Hart, 2010).

Others similarly describe the “good life” as based on individual worldviews and collective principles (Hart, 1999). These attributes are made up of balance, relationship,

harmony, and growth as essential to healing and a healthy way of life (Deer, Y.U; Hart, 1999). Operating within and upholding these attributes ensures that “the people will feel safe, secure and able to live the “good life” (Laboucane-Benson, Gibson, Benson & Miller, 2012, p. 5). Just as “The Métis Women’s Circle Statement of Purpose” suggests, our path to healing and wellbeing is dependant upon our personal relationship and connection to these attributes—including to the natural world, to ourselves, and to each other.

My intent is not to analyze the individuality of every unique “good life” model, but rather to acknowledge the commonalities within this concept that provide us with a usable approach centred on Indigenous worldviews and an understandings of Indigenous health and wellbeing. Neither am I denying the diversity of the Métis, Anishnabe/Ojibwe, Cree, or any other Indigenous peoples, communities, and practices (Ball, 2012). There are distinct and separate experiences, worldviews, and values that mark each individual cultural framework and understanding (Anderson, 2011). I am suggesting that my personal connection and relationship to my homeland, my ancestors, and my Elders and their teachings have provided me with the basis for my epistemological and ontological perspectives, and thus its application within my work.

Mino-pimatisiwin and a Relational Way of Being

That being said, this approach is built on the fundamental understanding that the “good life” is as an ongoing state of “building, strengthening and renewing our relationships” (Laboucane-Benson, Gibson, Benson & Miller, 2012, p. 6). Also known as the relational way, many Indigenous ways of knowing and being are centred on “the processes of relationships” (Wilson, 2004). This refers to a relationship with ourselves, to the natural

world, to each other, and to our physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional wellness (Hart, 1999). Wahkotowin is a Cree natural law meaning “everything is related” or “kinship.” This basic principle is focused on the importance of community relationship. It is often passed down through song, dance, ceremony, language, and storytelling (O'Reilly-Scanlon, Crowe & Weenie, 2004). Campbell (2011) explained that wahkotowin, kinship/relationships, have been scattered in so many ways. However, they can be reassembled through our relationship to our Elders, to our stories, and to each other. Our relational ways of life can be rebuilt by returning to the principles of wahkotowin. These principles make sense of our lives and emphasize that together we can create spaces for balance, growth, and healing to occur.

According to Brendtro, Brokenleg and Bockern (1990), positive relationships between adults and youth are the basis for healthy and successful programs of education, care, and treatment. There are many models that provide a clearer understanding of how the values behind these sacred relationships inform our understanding of the “good life.” The Anishnabe/Ojibwe understand Indigenous wellbeing and healing as directly related to our relational experiences at different stages in life, from youth to old age. Also referred to as “The Path of Life,” this philosophy maintains a distinct form of Indigenous medicinal practice and healing method centred on respect, along with appropriate social and spiritual conduct (Manitowabi & Shawande, 2011). By maintaining this conduct and these values from a mino-pimatisiwin perspective within our lives, there is space to lead a flourishing, fulfilling, and resilient life (Radu, House & Pashagumskum, 2014). Although cultural values vary from group to group, Gaywish (as cited in Hart, 1999) identifies similar categories of values used by Indigenous groups: vision/wholeness, kindness, spirit-centred, respect/humility, harmony, honesty, sharing, courage, strength, and wisdom. These values

are highlighted within an Indigenous approach further promoting an individual and collective goal of reaching mino-pimatisiwin (Hart, 1999).

Making the connection to healing, Radu, House and Pashagumskum (2014) described the continuous process of learning, of developing life skills, and of understanding our historical and contemporary trauma, as cognitive tools that empower people to make positive choices in life. By taking personal responsibility for one's healing, and by self-actualizing these values within their life, an individual can attain growth and healing (Radu, House & Pashagumskum, 2014; Adelson, 2000). However, self-actualization has never been done in isolation. Hart (1999) explained that "native cultures emphasize cooperation, harmony, interdependence, the achievement of socially oriented and group goals and collective responsibility" to wellbeing (p. 44). A similar concept is Anderson's (2000) model of self-determination and the identity formation process. She explains the "good life" as the need for a supportive and nurturing environment in the childhood years. Moreover, this life stage is seen as a crucial time for children to learn trust, self-discipline, and respect. This can then allow for positive identity formation, and for the children to find a sense of belonging (Anderson, 2000). Family, community, and Elders have taught their children these values, through love and support. Although the models of self-determination and identity formation process offer varying explanations on this concept, they each have similar attributes that help us to understand our relationship within the circle, our place on Mother Earth, and the contribution of our individual worldviews and lived experiences. Michell (2012) writes about his personal relationship to Cree worldviews, languages, and culture in relation to the land. Michell (2012) explained the process of coming to know as a journey inward that eventually

spirals outward and is shared with our community, thus placing emphasis on our relational responsibility at a individual and societal level.

Campbell (2007) explains that the concept of “circle” and the “good life” are flexible concepts that are often overused. Thus, their true meaning may become diminished. She stated that “the thinking of whole is seldom, if ever, reflected in our work or our lives” (p. 5). She reminds us that although we can easily talk about the concepts of “circle,” “wahkohtowin,” and “mino-pimatisiwin,” the real challenge is reflecting it in everything that we do. Campbell’s words provide another example of what has been fragmented due to the effects of imperialism and colonization. Unbalance occurs when we are dissociated from the land, Spirit, and all things. When this imbalance occurs, we then find ourselves often incapable of reflecting what it means to live well in our everyday. Is it possible that by returning to the laws of the good life, by renewing our relationships and the teachings of “mino-pimatisiwin” in our own way, that we can rebuild and find healing?

Expressing and Living *Mino-pimatisiwin*

In the following section I will refer to literary works that elucidate an understanding of how the good life is lived and expressed within our lives.

Deer explains that the “good life” can be reached through “affirming and celebrating those aspects of our ancestry, languages, and experiences that inform who we are” (Y.U). According to Robbins and Dewar (2011), wellbeing can also be attained through a focus on Indigenous traditional knowledge as healing and wellbeing practices. Similarly, Hill (2009) provides strong evidence that it is only within an Indigenous knowledge framework that the

wellness of Aboriginal communities can be measured. This approach must be inclusive and holistic, and must provide balance between the spiritual, emotional, physical, and social realms of life (Hill, 2009). It is with the help of knowledge keepers, healers, and Elders, that we can build on this philosophical thought in order to reclaim “the good life” (Hart, 2002; Hill, 2009) Elders and knowledge keepers provide first-hand traditional knowledge that is linked to their lived experiences and their relationship to a specific way of life. The sacred teachings of our knowledge keepers are a gift that must be retrieved and sustained in order to awaken mino-pimatisiwin (Laboucane-Benson, Gibson, Benson & Miller, 2012).

aThese teachings provide us with knowledge to understand the principles of wahkotowin—our relational connection to the Creator, to creation, and to one another. Métis people who experienced and remember the bush ways remain connected with our first teacher, the land (Radu, House & Pashagumskum, 2014). Furthermore, the teachings, knowledge and experiences we gain from Elders, at varying life stages, all contribute to strengthening an understanding of our cultural values, as well as our place among, and relationship with, all things within the world in which we live. These relationships help to inform our worldviews and have a direct connection to understanding the “good life” from our own perspectives. One way that we do this is through the sharing of our stories.

Healing Through Cultural Creative Arts

Using Cree and Métis perspectives, the following section elaborates the relationship between artistic practices as spiritual healing and the use of Indigenous knowledge and community values as a holistic approach to wellbeing.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF, 2012) recently published a research series on the connection between creative arts and Indigenous healing. As mentioned in the series, the traditional practices of art, music, dance, and storytelling were “integral to a holistic approach to life, health and healing” (Archibald, 2012, p .7). Contemporary works on this topic suggest that the arts, culture, spirituality, and healing are not only integral but were and continue to be closely interconnected (Archibald, 2012; Recollet, Caholic, & Cote-Meek, 2009).

Recollet, Caholic & Cote-Meek (2009) discussed the use of holistic art-based methods as a practice for healing and helping trauma survivors. In these specific cases it was Ojibway women from an urban community in north-eastern Ontario. The intent of this specific study was to explore whether these methods improved the women’s self-awareness and self esteem, by working alongside a community of women at the Shkagamik-Kwe Health Centre. The women had all experienced oppression related to ongoing processes of colonization, such as abuse, violence, and loss of culture. By utilizing culturally sensitive art-based methods as tools for sharing experiences around trauma, feelings of displacement, and shame, the women were able to incorporate personal Indigenous beliefs and spirituality into exercises that helped focus on healing themselves through creative expression, self-discovery, and group interaction. In addition, these artistic processes were also a means of reconnecting to Mother Earth through music, drawing, and spirituality. Maintaining a focus on the diversity of the women and their unique spirituality and worldviews allowed for an ethical and responsible approach to the study. The end result was that the use of these creative and expressive art methods demonstrated an increased psychological wellbeing among the women, as well as increased socialization within the community.

Nemetz (2006) defined dancing as an art therapy that is directly connected to emotional expression. The dance allows for an expression of feelings that cannot be verbalized but rather are felt. Traditionally, the cultural creation of dance came about as a way “to express these feelings both individually and as a community” (Nemetz, 2006, p. 95). The women involved in Recollet, Caholic and Cote-Meek’s (2009) art-based program all experienced similar healing benefits, such as a strengthened positive relationship to themselves, to their culture, and to others within the group. Archibald (2012) explored a similar “Creative Arts and Healing” study where First Nation, Métis, Inuit, and non-Indigenous healers, helpers, and counselors were interviewed on the beneficial use of creative arts as healing practices. Jan Longboat, a traditionalist, healer, and Elder from Six Nations of the Grand River reflected on her *I da wa da di* healing project, centred on women impacted by the residential school system, which utilized gardening, traditional language, singing, and storytelling. “We used creative arts throughout the project because whenever you look at culture, it’s all art. Creative arts have helped women trust themselves and find their voices and self esteem” (p. 40).

Jan further explained that many women and youth hold strong feelings of abandonment due to the effects of colonialism and residential schools. She believes that the people need to return to a sense of belonging, to a family, and to a creative art (Archibald, 2012). One woman involved in the *I da wa da di* healing project plainly expressed her feelings: “this is who I am, this is what I have been waiting for, a whole sense of identity” (p. 40). Both research studies noted that its success was mainly achieved through implementing a program centred on diverse cultural practices, the use of art approaches that are spiritually

sensitive, as well as relevant community support systems (Recollet, Caholic, & Cote-Meek, 2009; Archibald, 2012).

There are many studies that show how creative and cultural arts hold value in addressing health disparities and strengthening autonomous practices within Indigenous communities and populations (Muirhead & De Leeuw, 2012). Holistic approaches of creative and cultural arts can in fact lead to improved self esteem, positive development of the self, and healing. Castellano (2010) stressed that Indigenous peoples have promoted holistic approaches to health and wellbeing for many years, yet the practice today is still primarily grounded in a conventional model of medicine. The spiritual healing aspects of cultural arts are tracked and documented in many studies related to music, dance, and ceremony (Amsterdam, 2013; Archibald, 2012; Archibald & Dewar, 2010; Nemetz, 2006). Castellano (2010) described a personal annotation around the spiritual connection to music and ceremony.

Practitioners and observers of healing and mental health have heard reports over the years from people who grew up on the streets of Canadian cities or who wandered for years after release from residential schools and were transformed when they heard the ceremonial drum or went into the sweat lodge. Something shifted, fell into place, and they experienced a profound connection to Mother Earth or the ancestors of their own fragile spirit. (p. 12-13)

This excerpt describes the contribution that traditional practices and the arts can provide as holistic medicine for living well. Hart (2010) mentioned that Indigenous people's

spiritual and physical realms are undoubtedly connected. Furthermore, human beings encourage the philosophical belief of that connection through the act of ceremony, expression, and ritual. When people choose to reclaim autonomous health practices, they create a site for the renegotiation of identity, culture and healing (Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014). One way in which the renegotiation of self is embodied can be seen in the practice of cultural and creative arts such as music and dance. In some African worldviews, dance is connected to individual and community transformation, empowerment, and healing (Monteiro & Wall, 2011). Many African tribes believe that the rituals involving dance are important, and for many reasons.

Dance rituals play an integral role in socialization, expression, and communication, helping to build and maintain a healthy sense of self esteem. They also offer a cathartic experience, not only for individuals but for the community as a whole (Monteiro & Wall, 2011). Many of the African worldviews, beliefs, and behaviours concerning health are similar to those of North American Indigenous people (Hart, 2010). They weigh heavily on the self being as whole and not separate, thus focusing on holism. They believe that wellbeing is related to balance and equilibrium within one's spirit. They employ "herbalists" in healing ceremonies and recognize the importance of Elders (Monteiro & Wall, 2011; Archibald, 2012). Living in harmony with nature and the environment, and promoting spirituality, are also general descriptors of an African worldview. Dance is "not only a form of healing, but [it] also represents a symbol of the personal, communal and social narrative of these societies" (Monteiro & Wall, 2011, p. 4).

In Guinea, the tradition of the *dundunbas* (community dances and celebrations) serves as form of entertainment as well as a site for societal healing and wellbeing. Similar to the African uses of dance and ceremony is the practice of Métis dance gatherings. Here we can further make the connection between creative arts and contemporary health approaches, as similarities are present throughout the world. Making these connections, we can more deeply explore the powerful nature of dance as a reference base for understanding contemporary approaches to Métis wellbeing.

Expressive Arts Therapy and Healing Trauma

Bernstein (1995) explored the healing attributes of dance therapy with women who had experienced sexual abuse and trauma. Using the Blanche Evans Method, client-designed programs were centred on group and individual therapy sessions highlighting dance movement as a means to work through feelings of shame (p. 45). Many of the women were burdened with depression, dissociation, eating disorders, and guilt. Through creative expression, the women confronted their feelings by applying dance movement as a way to free themselves of negative feelings, to release painful events of the past, and to strengthen self-trust and love. In one instance, the participants used creative dance experiences to release their personal feelings of guilt and to build resiliency. One woman “let go of ‘beating herself up’ with guilt. Her initial inward focus turned outward into a dance of powerful rage” (p. 51).

In many instances the dance sessions acted as intervention strategies that allowed for exploration of how “guilt restricted personal freedom” and ultimately stifled the goal of reaching personal autonomy (p. 51). Carey (2006) explored the role creative arts can play as

an alternative modality for healing trauma survivors. Researchers found that survivors of trauma often struggle with verbal methods of treatment (p. 10). Therefore, the use of dance and music provided an alternative outlet for articulating and releasing feelings. Although there are numerous studies that explore dance therapy in relation to trauma and healing, there is also a surge of research in the area of understanding creative and cultural arts as a modality for physical and mental wellbeing.

Chapter 3: Indigenous Research Framework

Indigenous Methodology

Methodology is understood as how a research framework and process should be carried out (Porsanger, 2004). Indigenous methodology involves the approaches and rules utilized to conduct research with Indigenous people (Steinhauer, 2002). More Indigenous people are now taking control of their research endeavours and employing methodologies that speak to the specific nature of their work (Smith, 1999; Steinhauer, 2002; Porsanger, 2004). Smith (1999) mentions that Indigenous research methodologies are “about centering our concepts and worldviews and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (Smith, 1999, p. 39). Steinhauer (2002) characterized Indigenous methodologies as a way to give “voice to and legitimize the knowledge of our people” (p. 70). Similarly, Swadener and Mutua (2007) explained that decolonizing research is about revitalizing and reclaiming Indigenous ways of knowing, voices, and methodologies.

Although relatively recent within Western qualitative research, more and more scholars are providing academic contributions to the notion of Indigenous methodologies based upon Indigenous worldviews and epistemology (Wilson, 2008; Kovach 2009; Ermine, 1995; Chillisa, 2012). As a paradigmatic approach to Indigenous research, the choice of methods also has to be congruent with Indigenous methodologies that are based on a series of philosophical principles distinguishing them from Western traditions. As Kovach puts it, “when using the term ‘paradigmatic approach’ in relation to Indigenous methodologies, this means that this particular research approach flows from an Indigenous belief system that has at its core a relational understanding and accountability to the world” (Kovach 2010, p.42; see also Steinhauer, 2001; Wilson, 2008). To understand the relational core as a principle, Wilson distinguishes the notion of “self *in* relationship” by emphasizing on the “self *as* relationship”, which is grounded in a non-human-centric relation to land, ancestors and future generations (Wilson, 2008).

Another important principle from Indigenous methodologies is the decolonizing perspective, which shows awareness of how dominant forms of knowledge construction, including languages of the colonisers, are used to reproduce indigenous peoples as the oppressed, and therefore calls for “adapting of conventional methodologies by including perspectives and methods that draw from indigenous knowledge, languages, metaphors, worldviews, experiences and philosophies of former colonized historically oppressed, and marginalized social groups” (Chillisa, 2012, p. 101). While this positioning is informed by Western theorizing such as critical theory, feminism or postcolonial theory, Kovack (2010) insists that a decolonizing analysis is necessary but beyond entering the settler’s discourse; knowledge production within an Indigenous paradigm is grounded in Indigenous knowledge.

Indigenous methodologies are therefore guiding relevant methods that are inextricably founded in orality. Through the relational fundament, “knowledge is co-created within the relational dynamic of self in relation (Graveline, 1998). The relation dynamic between self, others, and nature is central” (Kovach, 2010, p. 42).

As a Métis woman from central Saskatchewan, I am placing Métis and Cree concepts, worldviews, and knowledge at the center of this Master of Arts. Although my ancestry is not Cree, I have been exposed to Cree Elders, teachings, practices, and knowledge over the past decade and have found that this Indigenous worldview often aligns with Métis values, principles, and philosophy.

One could characterize this alignment as a mainstream Indigenous ontology. However, I am choosing to relate an ontology and epistemology that are personally significant to me. These experiences are inextricably bound to the relationship I hold with myself, with others, the Creator, and the natural world. It is my relational responsibility to respectfully use this cultural knowledge in a methodological befitting way (Kovach, 2009). One way that I do this is through the honouring of our processes on how we share and generate Indigenous knowledge.

Positioning personal stories within a conversational method

While acknowledging the wide academic literature and use of stories in feminism, narrative inquiry, ethnology or phenomenology, I conceptualize stories within Indigenous research by drawing on the work of Neyihaw and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach (2009; 2010). Reflecting upon qualitative research that incorporates Indigenous methodology,

Kovach shows how “the conversational method aligns with an Indigenous worldview that honours orality as means of transmitting knowledge and upholds the relational which is necessary to maintain a collectivist tradition” (2010, p. 42). In that sense, story is a deeply relational process, consistent with an Indigenous paradigm where the narrative is the primary means for knowledge transmission, “for it suits the fluidity and interpretative nature of ancestral ways of knowing” (2009, p. 94). The story expresses the self-in-relation, tribal knowledge and memory, where orality works as intergenerational knowledge transfer.

The centrality of the relational is also thought of in terms of the researcher’s participation in the story making process. While the relationship building between the participant and the researcher is key in developing trust, reciprocity, respect and responsibility (Wilson, 2008), the personal story situating the self comes naturally within Indigenous research protocol. Self-location in that sense is crucial in story as method, as it “elevates the research from an extractive exercise serving the fragmentation of knowledge to a holistic endeavour that situates research firmly within the nest of relationship” (Kovach, 2009, p. 99).

Kovach suggests there are two general forms of stories: stories that contain mythical elements, often described as legends, creation or teaching stories, and personal stories that are narratives of place, happenings and experiences (Kovach, 2009). Both forms of story are purposeful and offer an understanding of how to live life in a distinct way. They pass along teachings, values, responsibilities, meaning, practices, medicines, social cohesion.

The work of Anderson (2000) and Bakker (1996) explains how Métis and Cree societies use oral stories as a way to pass on value systems and worldviews to the younger

generation. As an example, Maria Campbell, (2012) a Saskatchewan Métis woman, storyteller, and knowledge keeper, explained that many of the stories that she shares today were passed down by Elders and by her *Cheechum* (grandmother). Here she recounts the forms of stories and their purposes.

My Cheechum also told the *ahtyokaywina*, which were told only in the winter beginning with the first snowfall and ending in the spring when the frogs started to sing. Ahtyokaywina told how we came to be here as well as taught us the taboos and laws of our people. Some of these stories were Wesakachak stories of foolish and heroic deeds that taught the young how to live “a good life” and reminded the old to stay on that path. The stories were multilayered with knowledge and teachings interwoven into each of them. (p. xvii)

Multi-layered and specific to cultural norms, the story of her Cheechum goes beyond the linearity of time. It does so by demonstrating the continuous purpose of story as either a teaching tool laden with knowledge or a reflection of human experience. According to Iseke-Barnes, (2009) the knowledge of stories allows a people to better understand their historical and contemporary narratives. In turn, this understanding communicates the meaningful stories of our people today (Iseke-Barnes, 2009). Similar to these teaching stories, individual recountings of past experiences are also raised as stories passing knowledge that has to be understood within the Indigenous epistemology and honours orality and ancestral ways of knowing. What makes them stories is that they specifically speak of, and to, their personal experiences of living (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Each story belongs to a specific narrator and contains a knowledge that helps to contextualize their own life, who they are, where they

belong and how they live (Leclair, Nicholson & Hartley, 2003). Although that story may belong to them, it also makes up a web of the collective story of community, one that speaks of resiliency (Iseke, 2010). In other words, the conversational method positions personal stories as a collaborative sharing remembrance process where the researcher is also a participant and where the relationship built within the conversation evokes culture, tradition, the spiritual and the political (Bishop, in Kovach, 2010).

Congruent with Indigenous research, stories are positioned within a decolonizing lens that situates resistance, recovery and renewal, seeking out the voices of historically marginalized indigenous peoples and centering Indigenous knowledge (Kovach, 2010; Iseke, 2010). In regard to this, Adelson (2000), a Cree scholar, described the act of sharing accounts, from historical to contemporary, as integral, as they put voice to the oppressed and challenge the “others” telling that has been historically biased and largely misrepresenting of the Métis nation, specifically of women (Payment, 1986; Iseke-Barnes, 2009).

I chose to frame the lived experiences of the Métis women participants as stories, i.e. individual narratives recounting past and present experiences with Métis dance, as well as the significance of dance within Métis identity and as a form of restorative praxis. The stories we share as Indigenous people are as Leclair, Nicholson and Hartley (2003) and Kovach (2009) stated, a testament to the historical but also contemporary experiences and realities of Métis women. More notably, the personal stories express the relationship to how Métis dancing plays a role in our understanding of living the good life.

My personal understanding of visiting would have begun as a young girl observing my parents, grandparents, and community relationships. We would often have company

come over and would frequently attend family gatherings, at my grandparents' house, or neighbouring farms and communities. Typically, we would gather in the kitchen. I would play with the other children or watch the adults share conversations, stories, and banter over a meal. Oftentimes one individual would be helping another with a task, sharing what little they had or offering guidance in some way. This practice was an important part of my personal education and has today helped me to understand visiting and sharing as a way of life (Leclair, Nicholson & Hartley, 2003). This is a practice I have come to know as the "relational way." These personal experiences are evidence of the way that I relate to the world as a French and Métis woman.

The visiting way in which I conduct my data collection is founded on ethical principles similar to that of Wahkotowin. Campbell (2007) describes this in detail:

... today it is translated to mean kinship, relationship, and family as in human family.... Wahkotowin meant honoring and respecting those relationships. They are 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)

Wahkotowin informs the understanding of our reciprocal relationship to all things, living and non-living. It places emphasis on our shared responsibility to respectfully honour and acknowledge Indigenous knowledge and its value to our communities (Kelsey, 2008). Keeping in mind that story and knowing are ultimately intertwined, my focus was on the

significance of sharing story as a form of knowledge transfer (Kovach, 2009). The conversational method was used to “evoke stories, our own and others” (Kovach, 2010, p. 47). By situating wahkotowin within a research context, there is relational responsibility that is upheld through the act of sharing between researcher-researched. The process of my data collection involved listening to and learning from the women’s personal narratives and stories about dance. In return, it highlighted Métis women’s voices as a decolonizing practice that situates resistance, recovery and renewal as central to our wellbeing.

Introducing the Women

All three women are dancers. They are from three different generations. They each possess unique backgrounds and stories that helped to enrich the purpose of this study, by highlighting the lived experiences of Métis dancers and women. All three women, like me, hold individual knowledge, personal stories, and life experiences unique to traditional dance and to being a Métis woman. Yvonne and Jeanne are very prominent dancers in the Métis communities of the Western Prairies and, indeed, of Canada. Their connections to other Métis dancers, along with Jenel’s experiences as a front line teacher, helped bring in a much-needed voice from the people themselves. The women are not only artists but teachers and healers as well.

Jeanne Pelletier. Jeanne Pelletier is a Michif-Cree woman. She was born in Crooked Lake in 1940 and grew up between the Métis Settlement of Crooked Lake and the community of Merival, both in Saskatchewan. Her father was Métis and her mother Cree. She is the middle child of six children. Both of her parents were Treaty, and she was raised the Métis-Cree way. She confirms that she always knew about her history, her worldviews,

and values. She recalls growing up in a fishing camp, where she was expected to help her father manage the “white man”¹ business. They would manage a fishing camp, trade fish in the summer, and trade ice in the winter. She recalls the dance gatherings that happened frequently in her community. Many would come from afar for a weekend of dancing, fiddling, and socializing. Jeanne used to spend most of her time with Elders and adults, due to her poor eyesight. She said that she had to grow up very quickly because of her disability, and was often teased by the children. But her gift was learning from many knowledge keepers. She listened and watched in order to become a Métis dancer herself. Jeanne has maintained her languages of Michif, Cree, Ojibway, and Saulteaux. Many of the teachings she received from her Elders would have been in these languages. The art of Métis dance calling was passed on to her by an older man who believed in her abilities. In those days, it was a man’s job to call the dances, but Jeanne took on the challenge. Due to this, she often faced discrimination and sexism.

Jeanne married and had eight children of her own. She raised them first in Vancouver, before moving to Regina, Saskatchewan in 1998. She was left to care for six of them on her own, after her husband passed away. Jeanne is proud of all of her children and the tough but nurturing way in which she raised them. She has numerous grand and great-grandchildren, all of whom she shared her stories and dance teachings with.

She is now one of the last original traditional Métis women callers in the country. She has been teaching dance for many decades to children, youth, and adults—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. Her successes in life as an Indigenous knowledge keeper, a

¹ Jeanne refers to the fishermen who visited the camp as “white men.”

mother, grandmother, teacher, friend, and mentor are highlighted through her storytelling and our collaborative book, *Let Me see Your Fancy Steps*. Jeanne has created three Métis dance videos, displaying the traditional dances she had learned and some that she created herself. Two of these videos were of young dancers she worked with for over ten years. In the 1980s she created the first comprehensive Saskatchewan Educational Métis Dance Curriculum to be taught and used in school settings. She has healed community and youth through her dedication to providing a safe place to learn and to be. Her focus has always been on Aboriginal education, culture, and upholding Métis pride. When she hosted her dance class, she always provided food first. Then the children did their homework. Only then was it time to dance. Many of those children went on to graduate from high school and go to university. According to Jeanne, all of this work was done as a volunteer effort. She never expected anything in return for all of that she contributed over the years to art, community, and the education of our youth and young adults.

I have known Jeanne for 13 years. She was my first dance teacher. Over the past 2 years I have worked closely with her on the publication of our book, *Let me See Your Fancy Steps* (2015). Personal visits every 6 months and phone conversations every month for the past 2½ years have made up a part of our interactions. She is someone I value and cherish in many ways within my life.

Yvonne Chartrand. Yvonne Chartrand is a Métis, Dutch, and German woman who was born in the 1960s just outside of St. Laurent, Manitoba, in the town of Altona. Her ancestors come from one of the largest Métis settlements, St. Laurent, Manitoba, where they call themselves Michif. Her father is Michif, and her mother was Dutch and German.

Growing up on the trapping line with her father, Yvonne recalls the daily teachings she experienced living off the land, including snaring and fileting fish. She also describes her father as an avid storyteller and Métis historian who shares stories about his own grandfather and the Red River Rebellion. She described her mother as a lover of nature and dancing. She was a strong promoter of education within the home. Although she learned much from her father and mother, she explained that a lot of her knowledge of the Métis ways of life was cultivated from the University of Manitoba, where she attended a Fine Arts program.

In 1986, she began performing with a traditional Métis dance group called The Gabriel Dumont Dancers, based in Winnipeg. She journeyed down many artistic paths and contended with difficult challenges before moving to Vancouver, British Columbia, to fulfill her lifelong dream of opening up her very own dance studio. She is now the artistic director of Compaigni V'ni Dansi —“Come and Dance Company” in Michif—, a Métis and contemporary dance company. She is also a national award winning Métis jigger. Her passion for sharing Métis culture through her dance transports audiences to the people's stories of the past and present. She often travels the country in order to share her knowledge of Métis dance and ways of life. She has gone as far as Manitoulin, where she presented at a traditional Métis workshop at the Debajehmujig Storytellers Creation Centre in Manitowaning. She holds regular dance classes in her studio for groups of all ages and backgrounds. She teaches in schools and workshops throughout Canada. Her ensemble of stellar dance performers, known as “The Louis Riel Dancers,” has extensive training in traditional Métis dance and performs regularly. Her dedication to creative arts and the social advancement of Métis people and education is boundless.

Jenel Markwart. Jenel Markwart is a young French Métis teacher, originally from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. She was born in 1989 to a Métis French mother and a German father. Although she didn't grow up directly immersed in the culture, she recalls fragments of her grandmother's teachings practiced by her mother. She currently resides in Edmonton, Alberta, where she proudly teaches students intermediate education as well as Indigenous knowledge, including Métis dancing. She loves working with youth and sharing the knowledge that she has gained from her Elders, her mother, her relations, and from graduating through SUNTEP. Jenel has always had a deep love for dance. She grew up as a contemporary dancer, becoming a Métis dancer in her adulthood.

Data Collection

My data collection took place in my home province of Saskatchewan, where I was able to visit with Jeanne Pelletier in her home. Many opportunities arose in which we shared longer conversations over the phone, pertaining to my research, as well as sharing of general knowledge. These conversations would last anywhere from 1 to 3 hours on a monthly basis. Mostly during these visits I let the flow of the conversation run naturally, asking a few questions as needed. I have a previous relationship with Jeanne from 13 years ago, when she was my first Métis dance teacher. Thus, conversation was never awkward or stilted. We spent the next 24 months having these phone conversations. We continue to have these conversations to this day. I sent Jeanne a printed copy of the conversation transcripts, as well as the data results and conclusions that were to be discussed. Jeanne provided feedback and input as we reviewed the outcomes of the work. This allowed for a reciprocal relationship

centred on our shared goal of accurately reflecting the intent of my research and objectives. I also recorded, typed or transcribed many of our conversations, with Jeanne's permission.

On another trip to Saskatchewan I had the opportunity to meet Yvonne at the yearly John Arcand Fiddle Festival, outside of Saskatoon. This allowed me to introduce myself to her, offer a gift as protocol, and build our relationship in person. She was teaching a traditional Métis dance workshop for youth, as well as judging the fiddle competition. I was able to take personal notes and reflections from our conversations while experiencing being surrounded by many of my familial community, all gathered to celebrate Métis culture. The event included fiddling, dancing, food, art displays, storytelling, educational seminars, and more. On a separate occasion, we had a longer conversation of 3 hours where Yvonne shared her life story, dance experiences, and information related to the research inquiry. I let the flow of the conversation run naturally, asking questions when needed. This allowed for a more organic, comfortable, and genuine response from my participant. Over the past 2 years, we have had monthly conversations related to research and the book project, as well as general discussions and continue to do so today. These phone calls are every month and last around 1-2 hours. I kept detailed conversation notes, as well as personal reflections, in a field journal.

Jenel Markwart and I were able to connect in her hometown of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. We spent the morning discussing general topics before moving onto a deeper conversation around the research objectives. Since I have a previous personal relationship with Jenel, our visits were relaxed and comfortable. She freely shared personal experiences related to being a Métis student, dancer, and teacher. Our conversation was flexible. I asked

probing questions at times, in order to stimulate further inquiry into specific experiences.

Although Jenel is younger than my other two participants, she provided relevant experiences from a different generation's perspective. I have known Jenel all of my life. Our conversations for this work took place several times over the phone during the two to three months of my data collection and lasted from 20-30min.

A copy of conversation transcripts was sent to all of the participants in order to create transparency throughout the data analysis process. The participants were given the opportunity to review the conversation transcripts and to contribute to the thematic analysis. When I discovered a theme or constant within my data set, I would often approach Jeanne first. Then I would approach the other two women for guidance and advice. A final copy of the results was made available in order to discuss any input, delineations, or objections they may have to the final conclusions presented in the study. A copy of the researcher's final draft was made available to the women. This allowed for ethical transparency and for any errors on my part to be reviewed before submission.

Process of Data Analysis

I analyzed the transcripts from Jeanne, Jenel and Yvonne's shared conversations and personal stories and my researcher field notes and reflections. I employed a "constant comparison" approach when analyzing these accounts (Grbich, 1998). This involved my reading and re-reading of each data set to search for and identify emerging themes. I looked for experiences or stories that linked to balance, relationships, growth, and healing in relation to the women's Métis dancing experiences. I then enhanced the experiences, and personal stories, in relation to particular attributes of mino-pimatisiwin (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Highlighting words or longer dialogue, and making notes in the margins, helped me to focus on my objectives and to avoid dross and off-topic information. This was a method by which I could vigorously seek out meaning and understanding across the collected documents. I present below the women's personal stories to position the women's voices to further elucidate on the relationship between their particular experiences, wellbeing, and healing.

Ethical Consideration

Martin and Mirra-Boopa's (2009) principles of research highlight that privileging the voices, experiences, and lives of Indigenous people and land is the purpose of research. Over-research on, and with, Indigenous groups has often generated mistrust and animosity (Martin & Mirra-Boopa, 2009). The authors mention that research requires constant flexibility and reflexivity. Keeping this in mind, as well as maintaining regular communication, allowed for the study to be facilitated in a good way. When conducting my visits in both an informal and formal way, I was conscious of my position as researcher and remained reflexive throughout the entire process. Offering a gift of tobacco to Jeanne and Yvonne followed Indigenous protocol and was a sign of respect for our relationship. I also maintained a regular field journal and personal reflections as a method of honouring my processes and staying present to the purpose of my research. In addition to presenting my University ethics certificate, the informed consent of my participants established trust and respect for their words and the knowledge that they openly shared with me. I ensured that the women were consulted prior to gathering information, and I also invited them to evaluate the project themselves before submitting any final work. I maintained the teachings that

research does not end when the final report is reviewed, and that I have a responsibility to the women to foster our relationship for future generations (Smith, 1999).

Chapter 4: Discussing Métis Dancers' Personal Stories

I began this study wanting to learn how Métis dance impacted the lives of Métis women. I also wanted to highlight how the knowledge and practices of Métis dance could help explain notions of Indigenous wellbeing. This chapter shares the three major findings that emerged from my conversations with the women. Métis dance (1) as a restorative and relational praxis of self-knowing; 2) as intergenerational knowledge transfer; and 3) as a site for growing cultural awareness and self esteem. The findings weave a subtle fabric that constantly reflects elements of wahkotowin and mino-pimatisiwin. They emphasize a return to the principles of wholeness, balance, harmony, and relationship. I finish with a section that highlights the healing nature of sharing our personal stories, including my own experiences in relation to this topic.

Métis dance as a restorative and relational praxis of self-knowing

“To be reclaimed is to be restored to value, to experience attachments, achievement, autonomy, and altruism—the four well-springs of courage.”

(Brendtro, Brokenleg & Bockern, 1990)

I share a personal story in order to make a connection to the relational responsibility of passing on the teachings and values through dance and how this art form is deeply connected to Métis identity and processes of cultivating self-knowing.

My first group to come through is a Grade 1 classroom. There are 17 of them. I quickly gather them in a circle, elbows out as a guideline for respecting their neighbour's personal space. I take my place in the middle holding Jeanne's Rabbit book for all to see. I introduce myself, first by my French name followed by my Spirit name. I see many little faces of all colors in my group. Just like the rabbits and dogs in the story, my group represents the diversity of humankind.

I begin, "Today I am here to teach you how to Métis dance. Does anyone know what it means to be Métis?"

As per usual I am met with blank stares, no matter the background of my group. I try not to show discouragement, as this mirrors my own childhood of uncertainty at this question.

"Is anybody here Métis?"

A shy little hand pops up. I crouch down.

"Tawnshi, nice to meet you. I too am a Métis. A French Métis for that matter."

I turn to the crowd. "Being Métis for me means eating good food with my family, dancing with my community, listening to my Elders, telling stories, laughing, making jokes and being proud of where I come from and who came before me. Does anyone here know how to Métis dance?"

Most of the little heads shake back and forth.

“Well today I will teach you how. I learned to dance from two very special Elders by the names of Jeanne Pelletier and Wilfred Burton. Does anyone know what an Elder is?”

This time 4 little hands pop up. My heart explodes with joy, for this is not a common occurrence in schools where I am normally teach—schools with a low Indigenous population. However, today the population is made up of mostly Cree and Métis children.

I ask one of the first graders, “What is an Elder, my dear?”

She responds shyly, “An Elder is like a *kôhkom*.²”

Another replies beside her, “An older person.”

“Excellent. And what does your *kôhkom*—your grandmother, or as I like to say, my mémé—teach or help you with?”

Five little hands shoot up this time.

One little fellow exclaims quietly, “They help you to be healthy.”

Another little hand peeks up. “My grandma helps me be safe.”

“This is precisely correct. They teach us values and beliefs, and they share their knowledge with us so that we can live happy, healthy, and safe lives together with all living things and beings on Mother Earth.” (Roy, personal field notes, September 25, 2015)

² *Kôhkom* is a Cree kinship term for grandmother. Variation in written and oral language is dependent on specific Cree dialect.

This excerpt reminds us of the dualistic realities that many of our children face. We see those who are often confused and uncertain about their identity, lacking an understanding of their cultural background and beliefs. During one of our visits, Elder Jeanne shared a personal story that mirrored similar feelings on the challenges of our youth at risk and the loss of identity. Below, she explained how she often faces these challenging realities in her role as a Elder and teacher in elementary school, high schools, and in university/college.

A lot of them are lost. Even the little Métis kids, a lot of them don't even know. They know they are Métis but they don't exactly know what that is. And they were never told, because a lot of Métis people hid themselves from being Métis. That's how a lot of these children are brought up. There are a lot of them in high school here (Yorkton) that are Métis and they don't realize it. (Pelletier, personal communication, January 28, 2015)

As suggested by Jeanne's experience, Métis children and youth continue to face identity confusion and lack of autonomous cultural understanding. Similarly, in my personal experiences as a young girl and even as an educator, I was often confused about my history, my background, and what it meant to be Métis. Much of this could be due to the imperialistic system of Indigenous classification and racialization that over the years has affected our understanding of what it means to be "Métis" (Lawrence, 2003; Anderson, 2014). According to Brendtro, Brokenleg and Bockern (1990), this deep sense of loss and confusion often leads to feelings of anger, indifference, and lack of self worth. Every young person possesses an innate need to belong (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Bockern, 1990). That being the said, my narrative and Jeanne's, also suggests that the younger generation's wellbeing is supported by

Elders, teachers, and helpers who believe in the need for their people to find healing. This is imperative as wahkotowin and mino-pimatisiwin philosophies are founded on understanding that the wellbeing of the people is interwoven with their connection to all other living and non-living entities. It is the responsibility of communities to share the culture, values, teachings and stories that help us construct our own personal understanding of what it means to 'live well' (Campbell, 2011). Jeanne's personal experience reflects the confusion of many youth, but most importantly highlights the need to recognize our relational responsibility to guide and support our future generations on the path to healing and discovery. Brendtro, Brokenleg and Bockern (1990) stated that in earlier times "the young and the elderly helped one another, and large families offered abundant opportunities to give and receive love" (p. 37). Many youth continue to experience traditional knowledge and values through dance, which in turn helps strengthen and make sense of their identities (Ball, 2012).

The research participants regularly discussed the powerful medicine that gathering to dance can provide. Dance mends the circle and builds courage, rather than discouragement. It provides the support of community and community values focused on Indigenous philosophies of wellbeing. For example, in this excerpt Jeanne shares the positive benefits of sharing teachings and values with young adults in a Yorkton High School.

There a lot of them in high school here that are Métis and they don't realize it. Because when I went to talk to a whole bunch of them, found out they were all Métis, and they were glad actually. And when I read them some of the books. You should have seen when I taught them some of the dances. They were just right into it. And the other class that I had was the art class and I

made them do some of artwork on one of the stories that I had told. Oh god I got some really nice pictures. They have connections from the stories because that was the way, that was our teachings. (Pelletier, personal communication, January 28th, 2015)

Through storytelling, visual art, and dance, the youth were exposed to aspects of Métis knowledge and cultural understanding. As Jeanne confirms, the young adults were able to connect to this knowledge and to these stories. This connection enhanced their eager participation in a group setting and fostered self-expression and the self-development of their own person and individuality.

The personal stories that Jeanne shared reflect values that in turn enhance the wellbeing of those engaged in the listening. Teaching stories were also often used as a way for Elders, grandparents, or knowledge keepers to show our children how to live a good life, by teaching them lessons, values and principles of how to live well. What makes these teaching stories old is that they were passed down by Elders before them, for many generations (Campbell, 2012). The “Story of the Rabbit Dance” is a story that Jeanne often retells. It has been published as a children’s picture book, both in English and Michif-Cree. Jeanne explained that she decided to publish it to maintain the way that our ancestors shared and learned the dances. According to Jeanne, “My book the “Rabbit Dance” backs the whole curriculum. Because that’s oral history and that’s how they danced, how they shared the dances, and how they learned. And that’s why my book was developed” (Pelletier, personal communication, August, 2015).

The teaching story was passed down to her from her Elders in the community where she grew up. Below I share a shortened retold version from Jeanne.

There is a Michif trapper by the name of Jacques who is eager to go and bring in all of his winter traps so that he can hurry and join his wife and 12 children at the community dance and gathering. However, on his return he happens upon various colored dogs and rabbits of all sizes, dancing away to the fiddle music at the nearby gathering. The dogs and rabbits are perfectly lined up face to face and they are taking turns in chasing one another to the formation of an infinity symbol. When the music stops they also stop. Jacques decided to tell the people of what he saw and together they learned this new dance, which they named “The Rabbit Dance.” (Pelletier, Flamand, Panas, & Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies Applied Research, 2007)

This story is at the heart of many teachings when told and explained by Jeanne. The infinity symbol can be found on the people’s flag; it represents our connection to each other, to the natural world, and to immortality (Métis Nation of Ontario, 2015). According to Jeanne, the story teaches equality and respect for all people, animals, and beings that live on Mother Earth (Pelletier, 2007). Respect for all things is a value that helps us develop our true potential as human beings (Bopp, Bopp, Brown & Lane Jr., 1984). The story also provides reasoning as to why Métis people gathered for dances and socials. These gatherings were a

place where community “exchanged gifts, stories, songs, music and dance” (Pelletier, 2007, p. 9) and directly experienced cultural practices, thus further demonstrating that they organically knew the meaning of living in balance and harmony with the land, the animals, the spirit, and each other. “The Story of the Rabbit Dance” enhances our understanding of who we are as Métis people because it identifies a worldview that is rooted in our relationship to wahkotowin—our ancestral practices, the land, and our culture. The story of Jacques and the rabbit dance represents how the Métis people relate the living to the spiritual and natural world. As a teacher and Métis dance instructor, I often share “The Story of the Rabbit Dance” with my students, as the act of gathering and sharing our Indigenous cultural knowledge helps define and revitalize Métis ways of being (Anderson, 2011; Edge & McCallum, 2006). This story continues to be taught and passed on in a contemporary setting, and with it the sacred teachings it holds.

Métis Elder, Maria Campbell, reminds us that wahkotowin represents the interconnected relationships we hold with each other and with all that live on Mother Earth (Campbell, 2007). The research participants shared personal experiences of dance community gatherings and expressed how they were reminded of the relational principle by attending these functions and/or by teaching about dance. By coming together, whether to dance or to socially interact, the shared interaction that is centred on a relationship to ourselves and to others is key to restoring wellbeing. Those interactions and relationships form the basis of our experiences. They help inform our knowledge, enable cultural revitalization to take place, and contribute to a shared sense of identity. According to Cree scholar Adelson (2000), the Whapmagoostui believe that wellbeing is bound to our identity, to the land, to our experiences and the “practices of daily living and balance of human

relationships” (p. 15). Many Elders and healers describe Western concepts of wellbeing as disconnected from culture, family, and community (Hill, 2009). Therefore, our personal lived experiences are fundamental in our understanding of wellbeing. More specifically, the shared stories of dance provide us with a platform for shining light on the experiences of Métis women in relation to dance as balance, healing, and restoration. Below I share an experience that helps to position Métis dance gatherings as a restorative and relational approach to wellbeing.

I am sitting at an art booth with my Matante Ka, helping to sell my cousin’s paintings and artwork. It’s the 2nd annual Halfbreed Hustle event at the Wabano Centre in Ottawa. I smile to the other vendors while I tap my foot and listen to the fiddler guitar duo enthusiastically share their melodies with the crowd. Suddenly it is time for a group dance: La Danse Du Crochet. We all gather to the beautiful star patterned center of the room. There are about 25 of us, young, old, brown, white, short, tall, big, and small. We line up in couples and face one another in two long lines. The music starts up to the lively beat of Drops of Brandy, a song that I know very well. My feet begin to move in a double stepped pattern that I remember being taught and my heart begins to flutter as it often does when my feet begin to move to the music. I am placed at the front so that I can be demonstrator for the others to see. I suddenly feel a sense of pride and accomplishment. We all dance in partners and cross back, forth, and center, hooking our arms and twirling about with each couple. I look around and notice that everyone here is displaying different levels of abilities. However, no matter as everyone is smiling,

sweating, and having an amazing time. Including myself! I take a moment to catch my breath as the song comes to an end. With a big grin on my face I thank Jeanne, Wilfred, and the Creator, for I have been given the gift of dance—a knowledge that I will share with others, as I have done tonight, so that the spirit of dancing, life, and our ancestors can continue to live on.”

(Roy, personal field notes, November 16, 2014)

I clearly remember this day. It was my first experience in a very long time in which I had danced in such a large group. The energy was palpable as everyone kicked up their feet, feasted, laughed, and together shared a mutual pride in celebrating Louis Riel Day. It was a moment that made me reflect on how I came to be in this place, at that exact moment, with the ability to share in my love for dancing with others. It was my personal experiences with Elders, mentors, and teachers who had helped shape a part of the person I had become and the relationships I had formed.

The reason I share this experience is because one of the understandings of Indigenous wellbeing is the fostering of relationships, both external and internal. According to Hunter et al. (2006) regaining culture through the renewal of relationships and through sharing within a community setting allows Indigenous people to find balance, healing and comfort within their lives. Similarly, the personal account that I shared allowed me to acknowledge my own relationship with Jeanne and the many who have provided me knowledge within a community setting. In turn, I was better able to foster a sense of personal love, healing and belonging for myself as I communally interacted with peers in my circle. These encounters and this shared love of dance contributed to my personal and cultural understanding of

restoring a sense of wellbeing and identity within my life. Scholars believe that it is these personal experiences that help inform our shared sense of identity as Métis people, and more notably highlight the fact that we are alive and well (Leclair, Nicholson, & Elder Hartley, 2003).

Similarly, Yvonne communicates a specific experience where the transmission of knowledge onto children in schools and cultural programs made up a part of discovering her own restorative practices. In particular, her experience reflects how the restoration of identity is recognized as strengthening pride in your roots.

We took our group to that Métis show and did our workshops and stuff and then did the performance show. And we talked about it and then showed them First Nation and then European dancers. And told those kids stories about their roots and then that you know nobody really knows how that Métis culture was created but in the end we all do the Métis dances, the square dance, the Red River Jig, the Orange Blossom Special. ... They are our ancestors right...And like these little kids that I was teaching. You know they like to have so much fun. There is just something about the Métis dance that is so joyful. And you know it just makes people really happy and it's so healing. Like people just know. (Chartrand, personal communication, March 14, 2015)

On another occasion when visiting with Yvonne I asked her why she continues to socially engage in community dancing. Yvonne has a long history as a dance instructor and

leader in the Indigenous dance community. Her kinship values and teachings are rooted in her experiences as a dancer, teacher and artist. She responded by explaining,

It's that healing. And it's that dysfunction, that hundred years of sleeping [that Riel mentioned], that 100 years of turmoil that we are coming out of. But it's like I am really blessed and gifted to do this kind of work. By being social and by being around young people and learning from them. It's like I am supposed to be the teacher but a lot of the time they teach me so much. (Chartrand, personal communication, March 14, 2015)

On another occasion Yvonne explained how her dance classes provided a safe space for people to gather, to interact and share in the act of Métis dancing, praying, eating and by just being with others in community.

It brings on healing and it takes away the pain. Some people turn to drugs and alcohol because they can't deal with the pain. And some turn to dance and music. It brings people together, it brings harmony and community and socialization. People are so grateful that I started that at my studio, because we are so immersed in the colonial structure of metro Vancouver that it is now a place of culture for us. So once a week they can come and have a smudge and a sharing circle, and dance and listen to music, have company and food. That is their place of rejuvenation and healing. They have stress of life in a metropolitan city, this is like a haven. It's like a ceremony that takes place from the chaos of their lives, all the struggles in their life. (Yvonne, personal communication, March 25th, 2016)

All three of Yvonne's narratives reflect passion and driving responsibility to transmit dance knowledge to our youth and to our community. These experiences allow an opportunity for many to understand a part of their historical past, and be exposed to the joyful and healing feelings the dance can provide. One way that she highlights the continued restorative praxis of dance is through the cultural sharing of dance workshops and programming throughout schools in British Columbia and other provinces. When I asked her why she does this, Yvonne told me she shares her knowledge with "Aboriginal students as a way to give them pride and inspiration about their cultures and encourage possible careers in the arts" (Chartrand, personal communication, March 14, 2015). Yvonne believes, like so many knowledge keepers and Elders, in the need for our Indigenous people to be exposed to community values, relationship building, stories, history, and teachings, in order to restore their own understanding of what it means to be Métis. The act of dancing and of sharing the dance with others in community is integral to the restoration of wellbeing for the people. It is essential to share and interact through dances, as they represent an important piece of the personal and collective narratives of our societies, beyond the racialized discourse of Métis hybridity (Monteiro & Wall, 2011).

Research confirms that belonging to a community is essential to developing a sense of identity (Kay, 2000). Brendtro, Brokenleg and Bockern (1990) explained that to the Sioux belonging is the most significant factor in identity development and is expressed through relationships to community. It is these cross-generational relationships, "such as grandparents sharing stories and legends with children," that help to develop an acceptance of self and others (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Bockern, 1990).

There is more research emerging on the need for nurturing environments, community support, and Elder roles in guiding our own understanding of what it means to be well for our people. In many Indigenous societies, it was traditionally understood that everyone had a role in the upbringing of a child (Anderson, 2011). To make a further connection to the literature I share a narrative that Jeanne explained about her personal experience to kinship, family, and community relationships as central to Métis wellbeing and health. As often emphasized, the research participants highlight the importance of kinship ties and practices of coming together through dancing and social events as central to their personal way of being.

Jeanne: Whether it was a Christmas or wedding celebration, everyone attended.

Sylvie: So would you dance at Christmas too?

J: Oh Yeah, everyone danced at Christmas. It was a big event. There were 2 or 3 different houses that had alternating dance dates. Everybody was there.

S: Then everybody would go to one place then go to the other place on the other days?

J: Yeah. The whole week, 10 days of celebrating. That's why I said everybody got ready for Christmas. New Year's was another day of celebration. That's where everybody would go around and eat from everybody's house. Go around and the evening the one who had the biggest house that's where the dance was. And after that there was another dance this way. (Pelletier and Roy, personal communication, January 28, 2015)

Community gatherings, feasting, and dancing were vital to the heartbeat of the people and to Métis identity (Edge & McCallum, 2006). Métis Elder Medline Bird defined the old dances as a gathering where people were surrounded by music, dancing, storytelling, and sharing (Whidden, Hourie & Barkwell, 2006). Seeing as this was their main form of entertainment, the people were left to listen to the music, visit with each other, and learn square dances and jigs (Anderson, 2011). There is a sense of pride and belonging in Jeanne's voice when I listen to her talk about these past experiences. It is important that these voices be shared, as they embody her Métis worldviews, beliefs, and values but also help to make up a collective component of our mutual identities. This is vital because all of these experiences from past to the present unsettles the notion of Métis hybridity, as Andersen (2014) states, and rather highlights the histories and unique stories of the communities and our peoplehood relationships. Furthermore, they connect us to our own personal understanding and processes of restoring what Métis means within our own lives.

Métis Dance as Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer

This section shows a direct correlation between sharing lived experiences of dance, and the transmission of values and knowledge found within those experiences. The transmission of Indigenous dance knowledge is enhanced and accompanied by the telling of teaching stories, childhood experiences, and cultural learning in various settings of engagement. Each of the women's narratives underlined the relational responsibility of sharing and passing on the dance knowledge to the next generation. This practice of transmission exemplifies the resiliency of the Métis and strengthens our individual and collective autonomy and voices. It does so by further demonstrating the deeply inherent

responsibility as a community to take care of the wellbeing of our next generation (Anderson, 2000). Robbins and Dewar (2011) attest that healing and wellbeing are closely related to Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural worldviews, and the practice of spirituality. By recovering, practicing and passing on these knowledge systems we see a shift towards Indigenous people reclaiming wellbeing within their lives and communities (Robbins & Dewar, 2011). The sources of this knowledge, support and values are family, community, and Elders (Anderson, 2000).

Campbell recalls that children always attended the dance gatherings with their parents, making it an “intergenerational exchange of community and relationship building” (p. 117). Furthermore, it is the practice of a cultural art such as dance that facilitates the process of these exchanges to take place. Jeanne explained that these dances allowed children to learn by watching their Elders dance and engage with one another.

I begin with a personal reflection from my field journal to demonstrate the self-reflexive practice that informs a researcher’s relationship to the process of coming to knowledge (Wilson, 2008). This reflection directly acknowledges my relationship to the knowledge of Métis dance and to my Elders and teachers. It further accentuates the responsibility of sharing and passing on knowledge.

It is 8:30 am, the date is September 24th, and I am making my way to Riverside school in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. I annually come to teach Métis dance at their two-day Culture Camp with their K-8 students. The leaves are turning and preparing themselves for a long winter soon to come. Their bright shades of orange, red and yellow reminding me of the autumn

seasons of Northern Saskatchewan that I fondly come home to each year. They rustle in the wind, whispering long forgotten secrets of simple days growing up on this land and the promise of that first frost. A school bus tooting its horn wakes me from my reverie and back into the present. My lesson today is to share the knowledge that has been passed on to me by my Elders. Onto the next generation I will pass on the dances and the teachings that have lived on for many many years before me. I replay my lesson plan within my head as I drive up into the visitor parking lot. I am equipped with Jeanne's Rabbit Dance storybook for the younger children and her personal biography for the older ones. Fresh in my mind is the objective of my lesson: to uphold Jeanne's personal teaching of why we respect the dance, respect where it comes from, those who came before us and of course eventually kick up our feet to a little jig. All that I have come to know and all that I impart onto the next generation has been kindly entrusted to me by my Elders and teachers. It is of importance to recognize them firstly and to remind our youth of this respectful protocol. Our Elders' experiences, knowledge and teachings are a gift and it is my responsibility to uphold, honor and maintain that gift in the only way I know how. I am ready to do what has been imparted to me, be of service to the next generation. (Roy, personal field notes, September 24, 2015)

I share this personal story because it reflects my personal relationship to my teachers and to the knowledge that has been entrusted to me. I must continue to share the dances and the stories of our people as way to celebrate the unique peoplehood of the Métis and of our

experiences. This knowledge supports a cultural revitalization for the next generation. It is by sharing our knowledge and experiences that we continue to un-settle and re-center the notion of Métis identity.

Jeanne was taught by her Elders as a young girl, and since then she has shared her teachings and dance knowledge in many settings. When I asked her why she volunteers her time to share this knowledge with others, she responded by saying that long ago she started exploring whether there was any Métis dance representation in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, and said she could find none. She believed in “push[ing] for my people lots and put[ting] my heart into it” (Pelletier, personal communication, February 12, 2015). Her main motivation was the youth. She explained, “That was why I shared these dances, to share with people, to share with anybody who wants to learn. It was never for profit” (Pelletier, personal communication, February 12, 2015). In the many conversations Jeanne and I shared, she often mentioned that she never received monetary compensation for any of the work that she did and that there was never an expectation for any. Every dollar collected from fundraising, awards, or donations would fund her youth and adult dance groups. She maintains a deep level of satisfaction and pride in her successes.

I am proud of all the students I have taught. Many of them stayed in school and off the streets. They also got good jobs to take care of their families. I tried to think of how many students in all. I think at least 1000 Métis bodies. The people who have guided me are all gone now. Maybe 3 or 4 left. But I keep going with the help from GDI (Gabriel Dumont Institute) teachers,

students like yourself and that is a great support. Thanks. (Pelletier, written communication, March 23, 2015)

Many Elders confirm and demonstrate the importance of preserving traditional knowledge by sharing it with the next generation (Hart, 2002; Robbins & Dewar 2011). The research participants also felt it was important to preserve the old accounts that relate to dance and its relationship to a specific way of life. One recounting that particularly sticks in my mind was about the specific ways in which she learned to Métis dance and call. These old ways of learning would have been somewhat different from the ways we learn today, as she retells here.

I just heard it, it just come natural. I didn't go to school but I was always mimicking the callers. I heard from way back from since I was 5 years old. I was mimicking everybody even when they dance.... That's how things went back then at my home when I was growing up. There was always dances and callers. I seen how the people act, all the older people and I was brought up hanging out with the older people instead of people my age which made it much better. I used to go to my parents and say and ask them "guess who dances like this" and then I would mock somebody and they would just laugh and they'd guess. I'd say ya if they hit and if they didn't I would laugh and just walk away. And that's how things went out back then at my home when I was growing up. So you see being a caller was not an easy task, it was very hard, because that back then it was a man's job, it wasn't a women's job to be calling. (Pelletier, personal communication, February 12th, 2015)

When I asked her what it was like learning from the older people, she responded,

At the time I didn't think I was learning. You know just hearing them. You know. And I liked it, because I like listening to them. And hearing them talk and say all kinds of things in the language. Yeah I learned lots from those old people. I was very lucky I was one of the children that grew up with the old people. (Pelletier, personal communication, March 23rd, 2015)

Jeanne's lived experiences directly inform a way of childhood learning that is linked to both indirect and direct personal and daily engagement with the old people. Jeanne's exposure to the cultural gatherings and dances as a young girl taught her to watch, listen, and appreciate the community interactions, the dancers, and the callers. Kim Anderson, Cree-Métis educator (2011), explains the value of play to the Chippewa people. Children would often imitate their Elders in their daily roles (p. 83). Through a form of play, the children would learn specific life skills by recreating the actions of their old people. The children's learning of traditional practices, through Elders and community members, was part of daily life. Jeanne emphasizes that the children and youth were expected to attend social dances and community gatherings in order to be exposed to these skills and to build relational ties. There is value within Jeanne's recounting as it demonstrates her own personal experiences around coming to knowledge of the dances. Specific to her upbringing and geographical location, it portrays the diversity and richness of Métis women's experiences in relation to dance, knowledge and relationships.

Indigenous scholars and Elders emphasize the importance of sharing our past personal and generational experiences onto the next generation (Anderson, 2011; Hart,

2002). Yvonne corroborates the scholars by recalling a personal story about her Métis father's experiences growing up on the land.

My father told us about his first memory as a child of 16 months, where he was riding in a dog sled with his mother on a cold winter day. His mother was pulling the blanket up to cover his face and he was pulling it down so he could see the dogs and the bush. I now tell this story to children in schools. My father showed us how to bake bannock on a log wrapping the bannock on the thick log and slowly turning it. He taught us how to snare and fillet fish. That he was a barge operator and took supplies up and down Lake Manitoba, how he was also a trapper and a hunter. He shares constantly many stories of Métis people in his community and events that happened during the Red River Resistance and battles the First Nations had. He shared how he remembers his grandfather speaking reading and writing in Cree and how he could read, speak and write 5 languages and Louis Riel seven and Gabriel Dumont eight! (Chartrand, personal communication, March 14, 2015)

Yvonne's narrative substantiates our processes of how we come to know. She learned from her father who passed on stories, language and teachings in relation to his own upbringing and experiences. History books and classrooms have reinvented the way in which many of us acquire knowledge and the way in which knowledge is transmitted. Despite this, the research participants felt proud that Métis cultural ways and traditional knowledge are still alive, and this includes the practice of dancing. Yvonne and Jeanne's accounts validate that the old stories of the people live on through the transmission of oral recollections in the

present (Leclair, Nicholson & Hartley 2003). Moreover, the participants' narratives demonstrate that much of the knowledge is transmitted through our Elders.

Jenel's experiences as a young Métis woman and dance teacher relate to Yvonne's and Jeanne's narratives. All three share experiences related to the significance of Elders imparting knowledge onto youth. Jenel was eager to recall her experience of learning to dance within community for the first time.

We just enjoyed it so much and so we said hey let's start an adult group. So then we danced with Russ and some other Suntepers³ and then a few other people from the community ended up joining. Then I learned more dances that way. And it was kind of neat because sometimes the Métis Elders that were in the Regina community would come and dance with us. Then there was a few dances that I learned through them and I also learned some of the history. Something that some of the Elders I dance with, and this was the coolest part of dancing with a lot of Elders was they would often share little tidbits of dance knowledge throughout. ... It was while I was teaching dance, one of the Elders told one of the little girls "hey you get your feet down on the ground, you are not suppose to be jumping like that!" (Markwart, personal communication, January 19, 2015)

All three women reflect on individual moments when they were exposed to community and Elder knowledge. Jenel learned the particulars of Métis dance from her

³ A nickname given to Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program students and Alumni students

exposure to Elders in her dance group. Yvonne learned about the lives of her people through her father's oral renditions. Jeanne learned to dance by watching, listening, and mimicking her Elders. Each of the women shared similar traits in that each learned unique traditional knowledge, values, and teachings from an Elder or knowledge keeper, within a community setting. As I listened to the women talk, I became keenly aware that the knowledge and personal experiences of our Elders have shaped who they are today as Métis women and dancers. Furthermore, I recognized that our relational way of life was mimicked within the folds of these women's narrations. Could we say that it is possible to embrace "the good life" and reassemble our understanding of wellbeing through our connection to these Elders and to their knowledge? (Campbell, 2011).

As previously mentioned, the social gatherings and dances were a gateway for intergenerational exchange within the community, such as from old to young (Anderson, 2011). This leads us to believe that the way in which Jeanne would have come to knowledge from her Elders may look different from the way Jenel would experience coming to knowledge. Despite these differences, the need to share dance knowledge, teachings, and values was critical to the intergenerational wellbeing of the youth and continues to be so today (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Bockern, 1990). Each of the research participants, including myself, have made the acquiring and passing on of knowledge a part of our everyday lives. Jenel's personal experience as a young dancer interacting with her community has further inspired her to share Métis knowledge with her students. Yvonne, a professional Métis and contemporary dancer, has likewise assumed the role of educating in schools and at workshops across the country and within her dance studio. With her students and community, Jeanne continues to relive and share her personal stories of learning the values

and teachings that she acquired from the old ones, including books and videos she has published for educational purposes.

Respect is a common cultural value among Indigenous societies (Hart, 2002) and is transmitted in various methods such as ceremonies, sharing of stories, music, or dance. Jeanne shared a personal story about how she instilled respect as a way of life during her dance classes. By highlighting this cultural value, she explained how she provided the youth with an education sustained from the old ways.

Wednesday was the first night that I got all the kids for dance. There was about 80 children in that place. I told them after signing up, you have rules to go by. This is not a free for all like you see the seniors do. You want to learn you are going to learn the right way and that is to start right from the beginning. And the beginning is you listen to what I have to say. And on one of those big papers we wrote down the rules. #1 You are to have respect for each other, respect for the premises. Without respect you have nothing, nothing! #2 You come to dance clean. #3 No arcade... and nobody misses school. Okay, and they were all listening. And I told them, this is the way we have to start. And I said because we have no money. All we have is a dancing place that was leant to us by the Elders and we have to be very grateful that they let us do this. And I told them when you start dancing, just remember one thing: "You are representing people, old people from way back in the 1800s, that is how far back these dances go, so just remember how they used to act, how they respected one another, how they respected the dance, everything!

Everything went with respect. And that's what you have to learn and that's what you have to go by, that is the most important rule. (Pelletier, personal communication, February 22, 2015)

Jeanne expressed that almost every one of those children continued to show up for dance class. They did their homework and upheld the rules so that they could dance, spend time together, get help with homework, and eat a warm meal at the end of class. I was taught under these same principles and was constantly reminded to uphold these values founded on respect. Being a part of the dance fostered belonging and a space where a sense of identity could develop (Anderson, 2000). According to Anderson's (2000) theory on identity formation, Jeanne's knowledge and dance programming reflected the wellbeing contributions of passing on the values specific to a Métis and Cree philosophy. The youth were given an opportunity to learn skills and values that in turn helped to shape their own beliefs and understandings that would make up a part of their personal identity. For example, Jeanne further exclaimed that the Métis dance "opened doors for many students who attended" (Pelletier, personal communication, March 22, 2015).

They never knew anything about the real world. Just through movies. They were from the streets. So I would take them on tours in Regina. I took them to the hospital one time, and they surprised me. Those people (patients) had no next of kin and my dancing kids read to them and had lunch with them. My older seniors (students) they were sad and felt so bad for them, had no families. They asked if we could come back again. I said yeah. Then we went to the Veteran's hospital. We went down there and we danced. And when we

went all they had was big smiles on their faces and afterwards the kids went and shook hands with everyone and I had a big lump in my throat and I wouldn't have thought they would do that. (Pelletier, personal communication, March 22, 2015)

The experiences that Jeanne shared with the youth were a way in which they could embrace positive interaction with the patients at the hospital as well as with each other. In addition, Jeanne explained to me that the youth shared the dances in order to externally express the value of kindness, responsibility, and respect towards themselves and others in the group. She further related that the youth felt that dance allowed them to express positive feelings towards themselves and others. Similar to African cultural understandings, dance provides for individual and community transformation and empowerment to take place (Monteiro & Wall, 2011). Jeanne often felt they were learning about life values through joining the dance group. Her students were given the tools to embrace their own learning. In addition, they were given an option to be accountable for their own experiences, many which were centred on the principles of Métis dancing. The research participants discussed how when given proper tools by their Elders, there is space to reclaim Métis wellbeing and social development for our communities.

Métis Dance as a Site for Growing Cultural Awareness and Self Esteem

As students returned home from residential schools, dancing was a means of reincorporating themselves into Native life, ameliorating the absence of belonging and nurturing self-love. It was through dance—even though dance

was continually being transformed—that Native young people became more of themselves. (Amsterdam, 2013, p. 53)

The sharing of our stories is a restorative practice that allows us to grow self knowing, cultural awareness and feelings of belonging (Iseke-Barnes, 2009). I make a connection by sharing a personal story from one of my visits with Jeanne.

I am sitting across from Jeanne in her kitchen. Her daughter Rogerine comes in and out and joins our visiting, also listening in on her mother's stories, we all laugh together. Jeanne always manages to bring out the humour in so many ways. She is sharing the many success stories of Métis students in her dance groups from over the years. One in particular sticks in her memory and it was a young boy who loved to dance but would often get teased and bullied by the other boys. One day she said to that boy, "Don't let those boys talk you out of it. They are jealous because they can't dance as well as you can. You want to dance, go dancing. With all your heart!"

She proceeded to tell me that he went on to graduate and become a professional ballet dancer in London, England and had won an award. She said she always knew he'd become a dancer someday, her "little Métis ballet dancer" she called him. I could see in that moment that Jeanne's constant support, her knowledge and guidance as an Elder provided a healing strength for so many youth. I unexpectedly blurted out a question that leapt into my mind.

“How does one know what they are supposed to do in life?” I asked her. Something stirred inside me. I suddenly felt extremely emotional, tears welling behind my eyes.

Without hesitation Jeanne responded, “You feel it. You feel it. You follow, like I say you follow your heart. Intuition, it tells you everything. You think about it, you dream about it, you talk about it. And then it comes to you. Never forget that, especially if you are searching for your gift, or you can have several gifts. It will just get there. When the time is right, it will get there. You may have been doing it all along and you won’t even know it. Springs right at you! Make sure you use them all and don’t abuse them. If you are unsure, just try it! Sometimes it doesn’t want to work the first time, the second time but it’ll work, it’ll work.”

In that moment my entire being felt altogether relieved and exhausted. It was as though I had just taken in an entire seminar worth of information in that short 10 minutes of listening to Jeanne. I acknowledged her teaching by simply nodding my head and listening. I was emotionally inspired by the life knowledge that Jeanne had shared with me and it would not be our last. It told me to never give up on my dreams, to trust my intuition, to believe that my gifts are always with me, that once accessed I must respect those gifts. To me this was healing. (Pelletier and Roy, personal communication, March 22, 2015)

My relationship to Jeanne and my acknowledgement of this moment are aligned with the attributes of wahkotowin. Wahkotowin informs our understanding of our relationship to

all living and non-living things (Kelsey, 2008). In this particular narrative, wahkotowin is demonstrated through the relational experience between both researcher and researched. This teaching from Jeanne helped to restore and acknowledge a part of my uncertain spirit. The teaching enabled me to realize that I am fully capable of growing self-courage and self esteem, and that my path in life is reachable. Similar to the Métis ballet dancing boy, I am learning to recognize that the Creator has surrounded me with all that I need to succeed, and that it was always there, from the day I was born to the day I climbed that Sacred Tree and found Meego Neepsi hidden and waiting to be reclaimed between her branches. I could now fully make sense of why so many of her youth were successful. This was made clear through my own personal relationship and experiences with Jeanne. The reason I shared this narrative is because it reflects the undeniable presence of wahkotowin and its true meaning of kinship and community wellbeing.

In order to better highlight the women's relationship to Métis dancing, I asked Yvonne why she had begun to dance as a young woman. She responded with the passage below.

I think it was for me, a way that I could express myself. Dance made me feel as though I was saying something. Because I was always a really shy person. And you know with all the dysfunction and all the rotten stuff I had really low self esteem. My social skills were really not developed but it was a way that I could express myself that felt like so good. It was something, I found something in dance. You can say things in dance that you cannot say with words. [You have the feeling and the emotion](#)

[and the spirit of the dance that really made me feel like I was communicating something really important.](#) (Chartrand, personal communication, March 29, 2015).

Yvonne's response correlates with the belief that Métis dance is a site for growing self esteem and for sharing our voice. I also learned about wellbeing through Yvonne's sharing. Wellbeing took on a new meaning when Yvonne explained to me that dance presented her with a physical outlet that spoke to her spirit. Although Yvonne was faced with struggles that many Métis youth and adolescents face, she was able to express and restore a part of her identity in a non-verbal way. Dancing allowed her to celebrate who she was, and it affirmed her identity through the spiritual expression of dance. To make the connection, Yvonne's narrative lends itself to what Elder Hartley (2006) acknowledges as a need for Métis people to collect and preserve their stories and experiences as a way to share Métis knowledge, reclaim a collective identity and dispel the notion of "authenticity."

Jenel also spoke of the relationship between Métis dance, cultural awareness, and wellbeing. She helps children of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds to explore Métis dancing, both during school and after extra-curricular hours. Below she shared her own personal experience of observing the powerful healing nature of dance classes for youth at her school.

When I taught it at school I had a bunch of grade 8 girls sign up, my one grade 7 boy and a few grade 6 girls...I still remember my one grade 7 boy, he was too cool for school, hated everything about school. Signed up to do it and he was the most amazing little jigger, He got it all and he was there helping other students too! We also had FIAP (Functional Integrated Academic

Program) kids come in, kids with learning disabilities and some that are learning life skills. Andy was a First Nation boy who was in grade 8 but had no verbal skills. He ended up coming into my Métis dance class, he was a powwow dancer and he sure did the jigging. He was SUCH a good jigger. When we performed in front of school his grandma cried, she was the one who took care of him and she was so proud. I don't know what it was but people connect to it. It's one of those things, I think it's the music too. You hear that music and you just want to tap your foot to it and go! (Markwart, personal communication, January 19, 2015)

According to Jenel, Andy found something that he could relate and connect to when he was in her Métis dance class. Dance provided him with an outlet to express himself and find belonging beyond his obvious struggle to communicate with words. By performing for his community and family, the boy could feel pride, and could harness confidence, which was in turn expressed through his grandmother's emotions upon seeing him dance. All three women shared personal experiences on an individual and community level about the holistic attributes of dance. Yvonne's and Jenel's experiences showed that dance could provide a site for overcoming personal challenges and facilitating feelings of self esteem through cultural awareness. Furthermore, it provided a space for belonging, for expressing, and for the growing of self-knowing. According to Ross (as quoted in Hart, 2002), the process of healing is often understood as "people taking responsibility for their own learning and growth" (p. 45). Also known as a step to reaching mino-pimatisiwin, healing is as much about individual growth as it is about community growth. Studies by Recollet, Caholic, Cote-Meek (2009) and Archibald (2012) show that successful art programs must be culturally sensitive,

spiritually centred, and have a relevant community support system. When our spirit and being are reawakened through dance and with the support of our community, then the path to healing becomes visible (Castellano, 2010).

These women's personal experiences, as well as my own, show the interwoven relationship between the concepts of cultural awareness and the growth of self in relation to wellbeing. Emerging research points to the arts as a way of "deepening, supporting and enhancing the healing process" (Archibald & Dewar, 2010). Culturally expressing oneself through the act of Métis dance does allow for particular self-help skills and tools to be accessed. Jeanne has directly experienced the act of cultural sharing and its effect on the personal growth of youth at-risk. She mentioned that dancing was an act of togetherness for the community and for her dancers. They would travel and perform at rodeos and volunteer in senior homes and schools, promoting the dance and its message. The fun and positive energy that it conveyed would attract many more to enrol in dancing. She also expressed her dismay at the fact that times have changed and that togetherness isn't as it used to be.

People don't know how to get together with the right people anymore. My kids used to go to lots of rodeos, went to lots of senior homes, all the schools promoting our dance. A lot would join the dance after that. We would first do a sample with them, the crowd, they would have lots of fun. Once they would get dancing like that they would want to do it more. Then we would pick up more dancers, 20 or so. Never short of dancers. (Pelletier, personal communication, May 11, 2015)

In this passage, the idea of cultural personal growth is exemplified by the need for togetherness and sharing with fellow dancers and within the community. Once others experienced the togetherness, enjoyment, and personal power of dancing, then more dancers would sign up to join Jeanne's program. It would seem that the Métis dance connects us to the rhythms of life. When dancing, we express those rhythmic sensations in various ways including healing and empowerment (Monteiro & Wall, 2011). The body and the spirit unite in a creative and artistic self-expression that enhances feelings of wellbeing both individually and communally. Jenel shared an account related to her own experiences of personal self-growing in relation to cultural dance as a prayer.

When I learned to dance, for me there was a lot of pride, because I didn't know much about my culture growing up. It filled in a gap that needed to be filled within me, wanting to learn something about my culture and then be able to go and pass that on, it filled that gap that was missing. And knowing, the one thing that always stuck in my mind was, you know my ancestors danced this.... So then being able to dance the same dances they danced, I'm like that is just another connection I have to them. I pray to my ancestors often. When I smudge that is who I connect to. So to dance is a form of prayer for to me because it's that way of connecting to them that I couldn't really connect in any other way. (Markwart, personal communication, January 19, 2015)

Jenel confirms that she isn't deeply spiritual (Markwart, personal communication, January 19, 2015). However, when she needs to pray or express herself, she uses the art of

dance as a form of connection to her ancestors. This is one of the ways in which Jenel identifies with being Métis. Being able to express herself through dance enhances her relationship to her ancestors and to her teachers who came before her. In addition, dance allows Jenel to feel pride in learning and sharing particular aspects of her culture on a personal and social level. Both Jenel and Jeanne's narratives highlight their student's experiences as a form of personal growing related to dancing and being engaged in community.

In this last section I share my own personal story around the healing nature of Métis dance in my life.

I remember entering the classroom where I was to learn Métis dance for the very first time. I was 18 years old. There were 16 of us altogether and off to the side of the room was a short stout lady wearing a wide brimmed jean hat and dark round glasses. Beside her stood a tall man. This was Jeanne Pelletier and Wilfred Burton, our Métis dance instructors. Immediately I learned that Jeanne wasn't one to let anyone get away with anything. She taught us with an iron whip and an even sharper tongue. She immediately explained to us the values of respect and how the dance does so by acknowledging those who came before us and that we were expected to dance in a way that would honour them. From the moment I learned to dance under the knowledgeable direction of Jeanne and surrounded by my SUNTEP peers I knew something had shifted within me. Some would say a form of spiritual awakening or restoration of my being had taken place. I learned many of the dances that Jeanne had learned from her own elders, the Red River Jig, Rabbit Dance, la Danse du Crochet,

and Drops of Brandy to name a few. As I kicked up my feet to the fiddling tune and was spun around by my partner I could feel the smile spread slowly across my face and into my heart. (Roy, field notes, October 8th, 2015)

Many have asked me why I decided to pursue Métis dance and how dance is healing to me. Having pondered these questions, this is how I respond,

I dance to belong to something, something that represents a lightness that is filled with joy. It is something that belongs to me but also belongs to everyone. When I dance I feel free and I feel unburdened. When I dance with community I feel a connected togetherness to something bigger than the struggle. When I dance I feel well in my body, in my mind and in my heart and in fact there is no struggle. More than anything I feel that I have purpose in life. These experiences and these feelings are what make up a part of who I am as a Métis woman. (Roy, personal communication, January 3rd, 2016)

Each of the participants' reclaimed dance personal stories, including my own, help to make sense of our individual and collective identity. In turn it is these voices that are strongly connected to our processes of healing and wellbeing as Métis people. This is why I chosen to place them within the folds of this dissertation. May you take as much or as little from them as you require. However, these experiences do not belong to me or to the participants. They belong to all living and non-living things and we owe it to the next seven generations to share them as a testimony to the resiliency of our people.

Chapter 5: Concluding Discussion: We Are Still Dancing

Elder Hartley speaks of the necessity in collecting and preserving our collective and individual stories in order to recapture the resiliency of Métis people, to share our distinct Indigenous knowledge, and dispel the questions of “authenticity” (Andersen, 2014). In my thesis I drew off of the work of Kovach to highlight that reclaiming and sharing our personal stories not only helps us make sense of our individual and collective identities, but is strongly connected to our processes of healing and wellbeing. If we do not tell our stories then who will? Will it be the colonial “other’s” telling that has been historically biased and largely misrepresenting of the Métis peoplehood for over a century? As we saw, this imposed identity only contributes to the dispossession of our people. For these reasons, this dissertation also drew on the works of Andersen (2014) who insists in unsettling and rejecting notions of Métis identity as founded on mixedness and racialized narratives of hybridity. Rather, there is a focus on emphasizing people’s culture, land, events, and histories of the communities and peoplehood relationships (Andersen, 2014). When I began this study, I wanted to better understand how Métis women’s dance experiences highlighted the unique lives and identity of Métis people? In addition, I sought to know how these experiences fostered and informed individual and communal knowledge of Indigenous wellbeing. By centering the personal stories of dance at the root of identity, culture, and wellbeing, emphasis is placed on celebrating the voices of Métis women dancers and what it means to be well within their lives.

The first finding was that Métis dance is understood as a restorative and relational praxis for cultivating self-knowing. The women’s personal stories highlighted identity

confusion as a common struggle for themselves and for our younger generation. However, their shared experiences also brought forward the value of community sharing of culture, values, teachings and stories. In turn these values define our own understanding of what it means to “live well” (Campbell, 2011). The significance and enactment of social dance gatherings and their relational ties nourish our connection to each other, to our ancestors, to the spirits and to nature; therefore they are inextricably bound to a “good life” community approach to wellbeing and health (Hart, 1999). As expressed by the women’s experiences, Métis dance made complete sense when enacted within our community practices. Sharing teaching stories such as the story of the rabbit dance resonates with our values and worldviews, while providing feelings of belonging and wellbeing that strengthen self-knowing about what it means to be Métis. Wellbeing, in that sense, is supported by practices such as Métis dance and intergenerational transmission of storytelling knowledge from our Elders. As we saw, through the gathering and sharing in group, the balance between the spiritual, emotional, physical, and social realms of life are recreated and reinforced. These ideas that were suggested by the women’s personal stories showed how wellbeing and healing were strongly connected to wholeness, where identity expressed as who we are and where we come from is essential for recreating a much needed balance. The confusion upheld through notions of mixedness rightly condemned by Métis scholars (Andersen, 2014; Palmater; 2016) as well as shifting forms of colonialism continue to disempower Métis people, taking them away from the “good life”. This is why for these women, cultural gathering grounded around Métis dance expresses our resistance and survival as a people. The act of dancing and or being engaged in community dance, does contribute to our personal and cultural understanding of restoring wellbeing within our lives. It does so by

providing a valuable site to explore and inform our own meaning of what it means to be Métis.

The second finding highlighted how Métis dance is the expression of intergenerational transfer of knowledge that is mainly transmitted by our Elders who hold our cultural teachings. Métis traditional practices and community dances are family-centred, and embody the continuous strengthening of relational ties and their significance for values of wellbeing (Anderson, 2011). As discussed by Kay (2000) the participant's experiences exemplified important values such as respect and the meaning of relationship through the reciprocal nature of gathering, dancing and sharing knowledge with one another. More specifically, the dances and gatherings allow for an exchange of knowledge, teachings and values to be transmitted to the younger generation. All three women and myself, shared experiences where passing on the dances and Métis knowledge with others was essential to our personal understanding of wellbeing and cultural identity, as it is a knowledge that comes from our ancestors and reflects the continuity of our traditions. Healing and wellbeing are closely related to the people's resiliency in acknowledging their own worldviews, knowledge systems, spirituality, and cultural practices (Robbins & Dewar, 2011). Our Elders' contributions are at the heart of intergenerational knowledge transfer. As we saw, the sacred teachings of our knowledge keepers are a gift that must be retrieved and sustained in order to awaken *mino-pimatisiwin* (Laboucane-Benson, Gibson, Benson & Miller, 2012). The women participants represented three different generations and it was clear for them that the knowledge that was passed on to them was a clear responsibility for which they were accountable to their community and to future generations, but also to all their relations.

My third finding builds upon the significance of intergenerational knowledge transfer and how Métis dance practice nourishes self-knowing grounded in a wholeness notion of wellbeing. Métis dance was then presented as a site for growing cultural awareness and self esteem. Each of the women described how experiences enacted through Métis dance provided a way in which they could express themselves, share their voice, culturally connect, develop positive feelings and self esteem. One participant explained how it was a form of prayer and spirituality to her, a way that she could relate to her ancestors. According to Recollet, Caholic and Cote-Meek (2009), partaking in creative arts is beneficial in restoring health and wellbeing within Indigenous peoples' lives. Furthermore, it allows us to access the attributes of *mino-pimatisiwin* (Hart, 1999). Reclaiming Métis-based practices of wellbeing include rebuilding and reconstructing a whole sense of self. This process of reconstruction invites us to reclaim and to reframe the traditional ways of being, in order to positively express identity in ways that nurture the wellbeing of our community (Anderson, 2000). As Métis women and dancers, we have demonstrated the act of reclaiming and revitalizing a sense of self through the restorative act of dance. It is evident that a supportive environment whereby Indigenous knowledge, values, and teachings are shared does reflect "the good life". Whether we came to know by an Elder or a teacher—we are connected to our culture, to our stories, and to our feelings.

The need to recover and tell our personal stories serves our processes of decolonizing, restoring, and healing. More importantly it provides us with a way to gather, support, and share our voices. Consecutively, it is the act of sharing with one another that helps the people to better understand, respect, and embrace Métis ways of being, both past and present (Leclair, Nicholson & Elder Hartley, 2003). Our lived experiences are about

sorrow, about discovery, and about healing. However they are told, they remain personal stories of the people. They are stories that contribute to a greater understanding beyond the historical wounds of time and beyond a colonial telling that wishes to continue in challenging our identity. Furthermore, it is the sharing of lived experiences that allows us to work through our own experiences so that we may conceptualize and apply self-meaning to what it means to live well, both individually and as a community. The sharing of our voices is crucial as it helps take control of our people's endeavours. These endeavours are about centering our worldviews and then coming to know and claim who we are from our own perspectives and through our own stories (Smith, 1999). This decolonizing lens works then towards legitimizing, revitalizing and reclaiming the knowledge of our people.

This study points to what is hoped will be productive questions for future inquiry. As a researcher, teacher and dancer, I have often questioned how we further document and preserve the dances and the women's stories. How does it further benefit the women or the community? How can we properly integrate the knowledge of the dances into the dominant society? How do we do so without exploiting our own people—in particular our own Elders? Can we create even more effective spaces to acknowledge our healing stories as Métis dancers and women? More research is needed in the area of educational accountability and accurate representation of Métis knowledge systems and practices as facilitators for understanding wellbeing. Moreover, as Robbins & Dewar (2011) attest, there is a social need to acknowledge and to integrate diverse worldviews for improved accessibility to health practices rooted in Indigenous knowledge, such as dance.

The search for a healing path is not without its struggles. All three women communicated that they experienced moments of great discouragement and difficulty within their lives. However, all three women nonetheless share a belief in, and a commitment to, passing on the dances for the betterment of their communities—and especially of the youth. Their inherent responsibility as artists, to “bring the people’s spirit back” (as Louis Riel exclaimed 130 years ago)—has lived on in their fancy footwork and in the rhythm of their hearts. In conclusion, this dissertation conveys the singular message of our shared creation. We are still alive, we are well, and we are *still dancing*.

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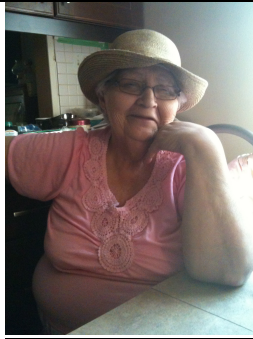
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Appendix A: Photographs



Jeanne Pelletier at her home
in Yorkton



Sylvie Roy at Summer
Solstice Aboriginal Arts
Festival



Sylvie Roy, 18 years old
(top row first to the left)



Louis Riel Métis Dancers in
Vancouver, with Jeanne and
Musicians



Yvonne Chartrand



Jenel Markwart



Sylvie teaching dance at
Ottawa youth health center



Sylvie and her Aunt Ka dancing
at Halfbreed Hustle in Ottawa

(Photo Permission from Campagni V'ni Dansi and Métis Nation of Ontario)