

From the Conflict of Domestic Violence to the Pursuit of Intra-Psychic Reconciliation

A Blended Theory (Grounded, Heuristic and Structures of Blessing) probe of Spirituality and Religious Based Coping Strategies; in the Context of Domestic Violence as Experienced by First Nations Women in Sioux Lookout Zone

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Abstract

Key Words: First Nations, Women, Domestic Violence, Spirituality, Religious Beliefs, Intra-Psychic, Reconciliation, Coping Strategies and Sioux Lookout Zone.

Knowledge concerning spirituality may surface from varied locations. This research sought to chart how knowledge about spirituality and religious based teachings influenced some women from the Sioux Lookout, north western Ontario region. It focused amongst the life-world experiences of four First Nation's female domestic violence DV survivors who are in the process of pursuing intra-psyche (self) reconciliation. Listening to and examining their stories revealed the inter-sectionality of DV and Spirituality or Religious beliefs, and how they have worked to shape their Identity. In the process, new insights arouse on the various paths that may exist on the road towards personal reconciliation.

New knowledge can also emerge alongside the data sought from unfamiliar places. Engaging in Grounded Theory (GT) research paved the way to combine an emergent Heuristic, Structure of Blessing approach: this enabled the researcher to personally examine and reflect on her own legacy as a survivor of childhood trauma. The outcome of using a theoretical relay approach to theory development is that research on spirituality can create the context to chart emergent, creative knowledge-making as a spiritual journey.

The research uses an integrative Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) mapping exercise in combination with Redekop's (2002a, 2012) notion that reconciliation creates a positive context that benefits from Structures of Blessing. This revealed that some Aboriginal women use their spirituality (informed by teachings) and or religious beliefs as guides.

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Chapter One:

1.0 Problematique

Deep-rooted conflict is that which implicates the core of our identities. This identity core has cognitive, emotional, physiological and spiritual dimensions to it. It is complex, carrying within experiences that we have had as well as cumulative experiences passed on from our ancestors. It forms the basis for our imagination of any future trajectory. ...

Strong emotions, violence and relational breakdown are signs that deep rooted conflict is present (Redekop 2001, 11-12).

There are many women¹ who deal with social challenges in their life-world² based on beliefs³ systems that are informed by religious principles or dogmas. Many women draw on these religious teachings to make sense of the emotional, physical, spiritual and ideological issues that they face.⁴ There is a growing body of academic research⁵ which suggest that this is not a new phenomenon. In fact, spirituality has a particular role to play in current strategies (whether drawn from the fields of counselling, medicine, conflict resolution, etc.) to mitigate personal conflict. Pargament (2007) suggests that “many people look to their spirituality for support and guidance in times of stress. In fact, for some groups spirituality is one of the most commonly used methods of coping” (10).

When conducting literature reviews about marginalized woman (i.e. immigrant women, women of colour who struggle to establish themselves in spite of the economic, socio-cultural—race class and systemic oppression experienced) and the role their spirituality and/or religious belief plays in relation to their identity and conflicts, the task of acquiring experiential research information in academia proved to be challenging. Perhaps, it is as Tina Beattie (2005) notes

“the study of religion and gender situates itself at a complex interface between two contested fields of scholarship” (65). However, knowledge about marginalized people does not only emerge from within academia. The mystique of knowledge is that it can be found in unexpected places— with the people themselves. Knowledge can then be uncovered by qualitative research that impacts both participants and researcher alike.⁶

The research goal is to provide an understanding about a particular group of women (Aboriginal women) from a specific (remote) geographical location (Sioux Lookout Zone) concerning how they survived domestic violence ((hereafter referred to as DV), in particular, the extent to which spirituality and or religious beliefs play a role in their experiences. The four research questions are the following: how does spirituality or religious belief affect First Nations women who experience DV? What exactly are the religious or spiritual resources they draw from? When do these come into play? What are the nuances of this in relation to other factors in their lives? What these questions seek to reveal is how some female members from a minority group engage their faith and beliefs to mitigate the affects of violence they experience.

Embarking on a two-pronged hybrid approach, Grounded Theory (GT) is used first in an open-ended way to garner how women talk about their experiences with DV and how they interpret (find meaning from) them. Second, the GT results are analyzed from the perspective of reconciliation.

Researching the spiritual/religious trajectories of some First Nations women survivors of DV in north western Ontario serves two goals. Chiefly, it adds to knowledge within the academic setting – knowledge which is often used in policy design and development⁷, and secondarily, it fulfills a personal challenge to do meaningful research that creates pathways to peace. To enable meaningful research the researcher uses a Heuristic research methodological

lens to engage reflexivity⁸. Herein, she is able to rely on her “internal frame of reference, self-searching, intuition and indwelling” (Moustakas 1990, 12) to address the notions of spirituality and or religious believes that surfaces (interiorly) throughout the time period of the research. The upcoming section outlines the issues surrounding DV and Aboriginal women, presents the rationale of this research, and establishes research parameters.

1.1 Issues

On the subject matter of DV among First Nations in the Sioux Lookout Zone area, prior to this study, statistics have not been systematically identified in academic literature. In provincial statistics, what seems to be most contextualized is the gravity of DV in relation to the overall Ontario population. There emerges a need for available statistics to depict (accessing multiple variables) the full extent of DV regionally. This research does not seek to provide this missing information (because the research sample is small) however, it does recognize the need for a broader statistical base. To contextualize the group to which the research focuses. There are “approximately 14, 000 First Nations people [who] live in the remote communities within the Sioux Lookout Zone”.⁹

According to the Aboriginal Census data in Canada, “the regional distribution of the Aboriginal population in Canada is very diverse.”¹⁰ With the province of Ontario as home to the largest number of First Nations people about 158,395 or 23 percent.¹¹ Of the First Nations population in Ontario, an estimated 40 percent¹² resides in remote rural locations. Yet, First Nations account for “3 [percent] % or less” of the overall enumerated provincial population (12,851,821).¹³ Situating the affected population numerically is therefore relevant to avoid oversimplifying or underestimate the gravity of the problem.

Furthermore, numerical data carry visual weight, as such, the statistical estimation given by Kopvillem, Howse, & DeMont (1992) stating that “80 percent of native women have been victims of abuse” (14), points to the significance of this research. Also, figures presented by Aboriginal organizations illustrate similar high rates of incidents of DV and its adverse impact on women. The Ontario Native Women’s Association (1998) “found that 8 out of 10 Aboriginal women in Ontario had personally experienced family violence.” In “some northern Aboriginal communities, it is believed that between 75% and 90% of women are battered.”¹⁴

When the overall First Nations population is numerically compared to the mainstream Ontario population, it becomes salient that a higher rate of violence exists. Why does such a small portion (3 percent or less) of the overall enumerated provincial population (12, 851,821) experience such high levels of violent conflicts, of which some Aboriginal women are experiencing the brunt (80-90 percent)? This begs the questions, why is this the case? And how do they cope with it? What enables them to survive? What can be done, first—a from the individual or grassroots level and upwards to affect positive changes? Perhaps, actions taken from the individual level could inform efforts needed from the communal, regional, provincial or national levels to effectively mitigate such a crisis?

In the region, Sioux Lookout Zone provides health services to “thirty First Nations communities”¹⁵. Also, within the Zone among First Nations spirituality is practiced in different forms. The north eastern parts are heavily influence by the Anglican religion, the western by Catholicism, and among them a new faith is pronounced in the Charismatic (Full Gospel, Pentecostals, Baptist, etc.) churches. In recent times, the presence of traditional spirituality (evidenced in Sweat Lodges, pow-wows, etc.) is emerging.¹⁶ Beyond the above information

there is no readily available data published on DV, coping strategies and the impact of spirituality and or religious beliefs.

When one examines the trajectory of some female members in the above statistics, and among the thirty reserve communities in Sioux Lookout Zone, it is apparent that some individuals address their experience with violence in varied ways. Some gravitate toward addictions such as drugs, alcohol, prostitution, violence, criminality and others run away. However, this research seeks to differently highlight how women have operationalized personal changes from the context of DV into a life journey toward Self- reconciliation (healing).

1.2 Research Questions

The open-ended and semi structured questions used in the interview process are different from the questions of the research. This research systematically uses GT to explore qualitative questions in a particular context; this enabled the women to talk about their experiences. The analysis presented will draw out how they derive meaning from their experiences. Subsequent analysis and reflection on the GT emergent categories (themes) indicate to what degree the meaning established in the categories exemplify principles of reconciliation. Primarily, the research seeks to ascertain how some women have coped, what tools—teachings, skills or strategies—enabled them to cope, when these coping tools were used, and how the process of coping with DV interacts with the other areas of their lives.

1.3 Research Form

In this research employing a conversational style of writing is intentional. The conversational approach was instrumental in the constructivist GT and heuristic methodology employed to guide the field work (from generating research questions to asking them in

interviews). Maintaining this approach ensures that the research participants will still be able to intellectually relate to their story as it is presented to the academic audience.

1.4 Assumptions

In the spirit of GT and Heuristic research, it is important to indicate that no one approaches research without some assumptions. To this end, the researcher seeks to be reflexive concerning the personal, emotional, interpersonal and a new dimension the spiritual layer underpinning her assumptions.¹⁷ However, these assumptions do not nor are they intended to drive the research. They serve only as an outline of what constitutes her internal (way of thinking) location. As such, her own black feminist worldview (composing of culture, guidance from a Christian faith, Afro-Caribbean, immigrant, Canadian perspective) invokes the following four statements.

First, the researcher's culture has been influenced since childhood by spirituality and religious teachings derived from a Judeo-Christian faith. She assumes it is possible that other women are impacted by their spirituality or religious faith teachings. Second, women have the capacity to create ingenious ways to handle life's relational challenges. Many of these stem from spiritual or religious teachings learned in their early years. A third assumption is that women experiencing inter-personal conflicts also do experience intra personal conflicts. Fourth, there are women who experience DV and suffer in silence. It is assumed that some can benefit from opportunities to realize they are not alone. Sharing their stories can provide one adaptive way to begin or reflect on their personal journey.¹⁸ Listening and learning about the participant's story, enables the researcher to better contextualize conflicts she has experienced. The research then informs the researcher and enables her to reflect intuitively on the tacit

knowledge her life experiences generated, which is brought to light and made explicit. In turn, the research participant's stories become more understandable.¹⁹

1.5 Timing in Research

The issue of timing in conflicts and how it plays out in the process of reconciliation is important. In this research, the researcher must be attentive to recognizing that meaningful inquiry should be open to an intersection of her timing and the participant's.

1.6 Justification for Research

In reality, no life is static or without the potential for change. On this premise this research is carried out as an opportunity to glimpse into an intricate process of conflict to the perusal of one level of reconciliation (the personal, Self). It is believed that this can display the side not often seen or talked about. What happens to the victim of violence after the physical acts of violence ceased? This is an important question that deserves a real good answer, beginning first with the volunteer's perspectives and then reflections of the researcher. Also, there are empirical clues that indicate examining how spirituality and or religious teachings and beliefs have been used by the women in the study is important. If women are inclined towards such teachings, a variety of traditions are available that they may draw from which encapsulates the secular, First Nations spirituality, Christian and other.

Regarding the usefulness of this research, listing to and learning from some real life accounts of coping strategies (such as faith teachings, inner strength/resilience, resources mobilization, etc.) and seeing how they have enabled or disabled individuals to move on with building lives for themselves, their family and community would not be an exercise in futility.

To pursue the above research inclinations is to do what Miller and Chuchryk (1996) purport "that research [on First Nations women] must provide us with information leading to the

potential for change” (4). The herein research would add that this change is manifested in two ways. First, dynamic research should highlight change that is evident in the lives of the research participants and second, in the life of the researcher. Outside of documenting the volunteer’s experiences the research can serve as a first step toward informing academia and regional agencies on how to better gear programs towards women in similar circumstances.

1.7 Limitations of Research

This work captures selected experiences in a particular regional context. Therefore, it is not entirely generalizable to First Nations Women on a whole everywhere in Canada. It is not about all forms of violence experienced by First Nation women from all ethno-cultural and ethno-sub-cultural backgrounds in northwestern Ontario. It does not purport to focus on the whole human unit (male & female) in the conflict of DV. It takes a risk in deliberately excluding male voices in accounting for the scope of domestic violence only to create the space for highlighting women’s struggles and triumphs. Yet, the present exclusion of the male voice does not seek to diminish their role, rights or responsibility in reducing DV and dealing with its consequences.

DV could be understood as an expression of inter-personal conflict; as such it begs the question of how such conflict should be managed, resolved or transformed. However, this research examines reconciliation only from the intra personal level, particularly as experienced by women. The scope of this MA project demands that the number of voices be narrowed to systematically address the issues one at a time. The voices of the four women volunteers with a reflexive commentary of the researcher will be heard throughout the document. Other research might be encouraged to examine the potential for inter-personal reconciliation.

1.8 Terms Defined

The various terms central to this research project are Aboriginal/First Nations, spirituality, religious, identity, gender, conflict, intrapsychic-personal conflict, reconciliation, Self/ intra-personal/intra psychic reconciliation; coping strategies, and domestic violence.

Spirituality

Spirituality is an important theme. Yet, it is both prevalent and difficult to isolate its meaning to women in the region of the research. Literature revealed that amidst all the varied views, there is no conclusive or “universally accepted definition”²⁰ of spirituality. However, there are some understandings that do present an anchor to the meaning of the word. The root of the word spirituality in “Latin [is] *spiritus*, meaning ‘breathe, courage, vigor, or life’” Ingersoll (1994) in (Knox et al. 2005, 287). Furthermore, Knox et al. (ibid.) states that spirituality “is a phenomenon unique to the individual and has been defined as the ‘breath’ that animates life or a sense of connection to oneself, others, and that which is beyond self and others (e.g., the transcendent, God, universal energy, love)” (ibid.).

Sheridan (2004) in Vis and Marie Boynton (2008) have concisely put forth that spirituality is “the search for meaning, purpose, and connection with self, others, the universe, and ultimate reality, however one understands it, which may or may not be expressed through religious forms or institutions” (10). Waaijman posits that “in our daily life, as a rule, spirituality is latently present as a quiet force in the background, an inspiration and an orientation” (2002, 1). Hage, et. al, 2006, see the two terms as central to one’s identity and world view.²¹ Additionally, spirituality has been described as the “belief and participation in some transcendental realm”²².

Recognizing that spirituality means many things to different people,²³ the term spirituality is being used both from a broad perspective²⁴ and a more specific view to ensure all the participants' experiences and views are accounted for. It is precisely because the term can be associated with both formal religion and religious belief, as well as, concerned with resilience which focuses on learning about oneself and finding meaning in life events. Therefore, in this research the term must be maintained on a continuum that encapsulates "faith, reflection, healing, meaning, hope, and purpose" (Hebert et al. 2001, 687).

The varied literature presents that there is a conceptual difference between spirituality and religion. Authors (Sulmasy 2009, 1635; Waaijman 2002, 601; Waldren 1997, 10; McBride 1998, 128 and Burkhardt 1989, 71), similarly purport that spirituality is concerned with the way one lives in relation to the transcendent, but is not exclusive to this. Teachings, rituals and ceremonies all have a place on the wide spectrum of spirituality which can enable one to assume a more flexible disposition (coming into one's own self and experiences) than religion.

Religion/Religious

As stated early, some scholars perceive and thus define religion in different terms from spirituality. Religion that is in contrast to spirituality is that which is "a set of beliefs, text, rituals, and other practices that a particular community shares regarding its relationship with the transcendent" (Sulmasy 2009, 1635). Respectively, according to these authors, (Burkhart 1989, 71; Mattis 2000, 118; Weaver 1998, xi; Treat 1996; Friesen & Friesen 2005, 95; and Panikkar 2007, 11), religion means adhering to specific sets of norms. These norms factor into the thoughts and decision making of the adherents, and shape life actions.

Identity

Although one cannot apply one single criterion in order to determine the religious identity of a person, it is important to note that “identity is complex” (Redekop 2002a, 14) and religion is a part of that complexity. Notably, the way an individual uses their worldview (shaped by their religious identity) to navigate through conflicts is important because it can elucidate the type (adaptive or non-adaptive) coping mechanism employed.

Gender

Gender (female/male) is conceptualized as a social construction that demarcates sex role social experiences, (Oakley, 1972; Ortner and Whitehead, 1981, in Krosenbrink-Gelissen 1997, 226). Accordingly, it has been put forth that “gender based violence is made possible by the ideology of sexism which argues that women are worth less than men in the sense of having less power, status, privilege, and access to resources”²⁵. Concerning the issue of intimate partner violence, it has been determined that “women are disproportionately affected” (Ringel & Park 2008, 342) by it. Furthermore, it is because statistics illustrates that Aboriginal women experience DV at higher rates to their white female counterparts, why it is important to situate the role of gender in the context of this issue.

Aboriginals/First Nations

As a general role, it is important to refer to others as they see themselves. The herein paper heeds this remark by making references to Aboriginals/ Indigenous and First Nations, as the first inhabitants of Canada, who consider themselves to be “Inuit or Métis regardless of where they live and regardless of whether they are “registered” under the Indian Act of Canada”

(The Aboriginal healing Foundation Research Series 2003, i). American and Native American scholars may also refer to Aboriginals as Native American or Indian (Treat, 1996).

Coping Strategies

According to Lazarus (1993), as a term, “coping can be both adaptive [effectiveness] or non-adaptive [not effective/mal adaptive], successful, or unsuccessful, consolidated or fluid and unstable” (237). Furthermore, “... most coping processes, including defenses, are probably the result of a fluid, contextually sensitive struggle to appraise what is happening in a way that is responsive to the realities of a situation yet is also hopeful or even optimistic about how things are going” (238). In general, coping strategies can be stable or unstable, consistent or inconsistent. It varies over time depending on the stressors inherent in the circumstances. Tense conditions resistant to transformation factors into the approach individual’s employ to cope. This implicates how one’s emotion and action are oriented into the approach to cope (ibid., 238-239).

Some of the literature purports that “abused women find spiritual values and beliefs beneficial in striving toward recovery” Davis 2000, 1249; Humphrey’s 2000, 273; Lu & Chen 1996, 298; and Neal, Park, Diaconis & Omotosho 1997, 50). Furthermore, coping strategies are developed from inner strength/resilience, good support networks and relationships. Spirituality is also perceived as a coping strategy (Greeff & Loubser 2007, 289).

Conflict

From a conflict resolution perspective the term conflict goes beyond “normal disputes” (Redekop 2002a, 24). According to Meier & Boivin (2001) conflict can be that which “... resides within a person” (94). Similar views were echoed by theorist from the varied field of

psychology, (Vernwimp, Justino, Bruck 2009, 307-308; Abelson 1959; Mosak & LeFevre, 2003). At the individual level of analysis, conflict can be seen as the “...inevitable consequence of an inherent capacity to act in any manner and especially of ability to perform a multiplicity of acts” (Brown 1957, 135). When conflict is analysed at the individual level, the focus is both on the action and belief strata’s inherent in the participant’s experience. Thus, it is by identifying how individuals pursued self-reconciliation post DV that understanding is expected to emerge.

Reconciliation

Ifat Moaz in Bar-Siman-Tov (2004) posits that “the term reconciliation has gained prominence in academic literature... and in this literature, the term tends to be fuzzy, [and] its meaning [is] largely determined by the context in which it appears” (225). On this premise, the term requires a clear parameter for which it shall be used in this research. Redekop (2012) indicates that reconciliation is concerned with transformation/change. It focuses on living a life of blessing.²⁶

Castellano, Archibald & DeGagne (2008) specifies that reconciliation is concerned with the restoration of good will (described as trust & balance from an Aboriginal worldview) in relationships that have been injured by injustice²⁷. According to Schreiter (2002)²⁸ this transformation is seen as two fold, social and spiritual. According to Anderson (2008) reconciliation focuses on the personal transformation between God and individuals. Morneau (2007)²⁹ sees reconciliation as central in the Christian life. Thus, reconciliation can include all these things and more depending on the context, goal and individuals seeking it.

Intrapersonal/Intra psychic

The terms intra-psychic and intrapersonal is used interchangeably because self-reconciliation is being discussed at the micro—a person, personal level. Greenberg (1979) speaks to the notion that an individual in conflict illustrating splits is “an indicator of present readiness for change” (318). To view reconciliation as readiness for personal change is to explore how the (multiple ways) individual attempts (think and act) to enable internal peace and mitigate the conflict she is experiencing.

Therefore, the research aim is to conceptualize how “the fundamental regrowing of the basic ego, the whole personal self... the need for a rebirth and regrowing of a whole person” (Guntrip 1969, 317, cited in Meier & Boivin, 2006, 304), has taken shape in the lives of some Aboriginal women. In doing so, the reader is enabled with varied views that illustrates the extent to which “resolution of an intrapsychic conflict... rest upon the reformation and reintegration of ego structures” (ibid.).

Self-Reconciliation

This research recognizes there are a number of approaches to self-reconciliation depending on the academic discipline. From a psychology perspective, self-reconciliation can be pursued through four modes of resolution – denial, bolstering, differentiation and transcendence as outlined by (Abelson 1959, 344-346). Gestalt two chair counselling provides a three stage process for conflict resolution –opposition, merging and integration can proves useful (Greenberg, 1983, 1991). Others suggest a religious coping— the self-directing, deferring and collaborative approach (Pargament, et al., 1988, 91-92; Wang, 2007, 8).

A conflict resolution lens based on the thirteen tenants of reconciliation as espoused by Redekop (2000; 2002a: 2012) also provides an alternative approach. If none of the above options are available, confiding in a caring compassionate friend, receptive clergy or a listening ear has benefit. A humanist approach purporting reliance on the inner self (strength) to “will” out of conflict is also an option. To this end, it is as Barbieri (1996) maintains that one can mitigate stressful events “if we are able to turn our focus inward upon ourselves for understanding, we may find we are our own best support resource” (4). That being said, it is the conflict resolution and religious coping approaches mentioned above that primarily will be used to glean meaning from the participant’s experiences.

Domestic Violence

On the topic of DV the *Canadian Violence Against Women and Girls Fact Sheet* (2003), gives meaning to the term as “...violence against women [which] can be psychological, physical, sexual, financial or spiritual” (1)³⁰. Additionally, Wood & Kiyoshk, 1994, from the Quamish Nation initiated a program called *Change of Seasons* that referred to DV as “the physical abuse of a woman by her male partner/spouse and the creation of an environment within the relationship which fosters fear and intimidation. The overriding theme of all these behaviours is the attempted assertion, in a variety of ways, of power and control by the man over the woman, and possibly the children” (The Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series (2003, 8).

It has been said that “while women of all backgrounds are vulnerable to violence, some are more vulnerable than others, including young women and children, women with disabilities, women with lower incomes, Aboriginal women , and women who are part of ethnic and racial minorities” (Elizabeth Fry Association, N.D. 1)³¹. Regarding the vulnerability of victims of

domestic violence, “women in subordinate social or economic positions are particularly vulnerable”, and “most [of] the incidents of violence against women are not reported to police” (ibid). Violence had an impact on the individual on multiple levels. To this end,

Violence against women may result in death, injury or permanent disability, unwanted pregnancy, sexually-transmitted diseases, and/or emotional trauma, and in the longer term, abuse can lead to a range of chronic health problems.

Violence against women affects the daily lives of all women. Violence creates fear and this fear affects all women. The psychological and economic impact of violence against women also impacts their families and society.

Women who have experiences with trauma of experiences with trauma of physical and/ or sexual abuse are more likely to report being more cautious/aware after their attacks, to have sleeping problems, feel ashamed or guilty, are more afraid for their children, more self-reliant, and to have problems relating to other women/men. (ibid.)

Domestic violence has not emerged in a vacuum. It has been linked to the Canadian state from a socio-cultural, political and historical perspective. According to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the issue of DV is situated in a wider context of a pattern of violence. Also, this violence is emblematic of what the wider society commits against the group as a whole (The Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series 2003, 21-22).

Although, this research does not focus on men as victims of violence, it is aware that they are also victims. Literature has outlined that when men abuse women, often times they were also abused. However, this research focus is only on women, particularly Aboriginal women (as victims and survivors) who are exposed to abuse before 2008 and how they chose to cope with it.

1.9 Overview of Remaining Chapters

Chapter two focuses on a review of relevant academic literature, including a broad based depiction of domestic violence against women and a focus on Aboriginal women’s experiences;

particularly, how they have coped with DV. Chapter three defines and describes the main aspects of an open, composite theory that includes constructivist grounded theory, structures of blessing and heuristic inquiry. It also describes the specific methodology from inception to completion. The researcher also reflects on doing the research. Chapter four presents the participants' stories. The researcher also reflects on the interviewing process and how it impacted her spiritual compass. Chapter five answers the questions of the research and examines the participant's experiences through a reconciliation lens. It also extrapolates meaning through a cross-fertilization process between literature review data and GT data to generate new theory and insights. In the final section, the concluding discussion focuses on the overarching implications of the research findings in both a broad and specific sense. Suggestions for future research along with recommendations and the researcher's reflexive synthesis are presented.

1.10 Reflections: Initial engagement-- Authors background and connection to Research

At various junctures where I present my thinking/voice, hereafter, the space is created and marked by changing the text from Times New Roman font to 'Courier New'.

From a contemporary Black feminist standpoint, it is important to locate myself within the scope of this project. At various points throughout the research, I will use an applied reflexivity approach to illustrate how engaging in this research process has emotionally, socially and spiritually impacted me. I will illustrate how I learned about myself as I engaged with the work of researching about Aboriginal women who have experienced domestic violence.

My journey to find myself, purpose in life, value and acquire meaning from my worldview has been shaped by loss, tragedies, personal failures and within the past six years, positive experiences. The new opportunities that arose afforded me productive ways to begin re-shaping (maturing) the various dimensions of my identity, particularly engaging the spiritual to enable the other aspects. Thus, my multiple identities (daughter, wife, mother, student, and religiosity), culture and the politics I am addressing do intersect³².

Presently, doing meaningful research that affects peace in the lives of marginalized people has translated into the collaboration with four First Nations women who (on my invitation)self-selected to go on the record to share their stories. From this relative joint position I became more aware of the potential for (multi- levels marginalized- based on race, class, gender, socio-economic, political, spiritual, etc., and minority women) to pursue a revolution for change³³. The change I seek to generate initially commenced with me.

I am first developing the theoretical tools to assess how my family of origin and internal issues have shaped my responses to conflict in my personal life and in general. Then equipped with new ways of learning and coping, I look to other paths

(found in other's experiences) that illustrate additional options for change.

This change I am alluding to is to work with individuals who are interested in resolving personal conflicts. Doing this invariably enables me to (actualize an aspect of the faith I profess) to do as Jesus implored in the gospel according to Matthew 5:9³⁴ "blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called children of God." I desire to belong among the peacemakers in any society I dwell in.

To serve as a conduit of peace (caregiver) is blessed as it can offer a constructive avenue for me to contribute in both a broad and specific way into the human family. McBride (1998) succinctly captured this role I want to assume as a 'caregiver'. He further describes this life work of caregiving below:

The process of caregiving can be sacred ground. The caregiver and the one cared for can become channels of grace for each other. By being with others in their pain we can stay in touch with our own struggles. In such settings we can sense the breaking of God's grace into our lives. Although often limited by me, I see my role as a caregiver as being a facilitator and supporter of God's grace. This means walking with persons through the darkest places in their lives. Caregiving offers a safe and accepting place for their struggles. Caregiving assists them in confronting the neglected or ignored areas of their lives. It helps them get in touch with their true selves and find what matters for them. It is offering faith, hope, and love so they can struggle towards wholeness (9).

After reading the above quotation, I felt a deep sense of relief that someone else understood what I was growing into (becoming a caregiver). That someone else is already there (being a

caregiver), and has captured and resonates the sentiments indwelling in my heart. I am also aware that the term 'caregiver' could have negative connotations for some, in terms of power relations. However, the way in which I see and chose to use it demarcates my social (unconditional) and professional (reciprocal) responsibility in relations with others in need of support.

So, I view my identity as an immigrant Afro-Jamaica Canadian favourably as a tool to assist me in my quest to learn both in academia and outside it. Who I am and believe myself to be, can afford me a particular lens of analysis to perhaps understand aspects of others narratives that might go unnoted by those who do not relate in the same way.

That is to say, because I am not First Nations, this could afford me an emic view, and because I am not a part of mainstream white society, I see some things in a manner that resonates with an Aboriginal worldview. Consequently, with what seems to be an insider (emic) and outsider (etic) vantage point³⁵, I am enabled a little freer access to the varied sources of information generated by human experiences, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike with less apprehension from either side. Case in point, in my research both sides (women First Peoples and white non First Peoples) divulged their views

candidly about the other with less reservation to me. In so doing, they have revealed things that would not have been stated if the two groups of women spoke directly to each other about the same issues.

This has significantly impacted my approach to access and guardianship of sensitive information retained during the process of interviewing. It taught me that some research participants and regional professional and non-professionals alike might perceive and thus place me in an intermediary (bridging) position. If desired this can afford me an opportunity to become intricately apart of a solution to reduce inherent tensions in the host environment/community.

Recognizing this confirmed to me that I can uniquely fulfill a caregiving role in the research location because there is a niche I am well suited (experientially and professionally) to operate within. Thus, this awareness, has contributed to my decision to relocate from Ottawa to the Sioux Lookout region to live—raise her family and do meaningful life work.

Interestingly, other identities I simultaneously occupy, such as being a mother, wife, and student have aided me in my pursuit to garner experiential information of how some First Nations women have pursued reconciliation for themselves.

While I am cognizant that life struggles are not unique to just one group of people, in Canada some citizens' struggles are endemic to a particular environment and system culture from which they hail. The flipside to this is that life struggles also can and have served as a catalyst for changing the aspects of life deemed undesirable, non-productive or conflicting. In other words, to see this with a conflict resolution lens is to embark on an empowering analysis. One that would suggest that struggles can also usher in new opportunities to generate change (Redekop, 2002a).

Since my contention is that reconciliation is a dynamic process that needs to occur first inside an individual in conflict, I am most curious to see how the participants have already or are experiencing it on an interior level.

As my spirituality deepens and the research informs my life purpose, I began to see the need to understand how this process unfolds in other lives.

1.11 Summary of Chapter

This introductory chapter has outlined the researcher's curiosity to understand the varied ways in which intra-psyche or self-reconciliation is pursued by a particular group of, First Nations women within the context of their experience with DV. It acknowledges there is an information gap in academia on minority women and DV from a spirituality and or religious coping viewpoint. There exists even less documentation concerning First Nations women in north-western Ontario and how their spirituality or religious beliefs impact their approach to alleviate DV. Statistics were used to concretize the magnitude of DV within Aboriginal communities.

Qualitative questions were used to frame the GT methodological process. The research evolved within a context of time that proved to be unique. It transpired when both research participants and researcher were ready to embark on the process. The research did not seek to generalize about all First Nations women. It was mainly concerned with those who participated in the research. Major terms of reference (Aboriginal, religion/religious, identity, gender, self-intra personal, reconciliation, coping strategies, and domestic violence) were defined.

Furthermore, the research created the space for the inclusion of minority women's voices; a minority woman initiating a dialogue about other minority women. This encompassed situating herself (using emic & etic views) from a heuristically reflexive, black feminist standpoint to outline how her multiple identities engaged in the research process. The upcoming section will outline and discuss the various academic literatures on the subject matter.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

In keeping with the goal of GT research, the purpose of a literature review is to enhance not constrain theory development. This research contends that in academic literature, there is a gap between the knowledge available on how some Aboriginal women cope with domestic violence from a spirituality based and or religious beliefs perspective. Furthermore, the gap continues to increase concerning how they actualize self (intra-personal) reconciliation within the context of these beliefs.

There are three parts to this section. The first part specifically addresses research that generally speaks to the intersectionality of spirituality, religious beliefs and how they relate to abuse, DV or intimate partner violence (IPV). The second section highlights mainly some Canadian academic research in the form of MA's, Ph.D.'s, and journal articles on domestic violence against Aboriginal women. The third section presents how First Nations women are coping from an intra-personal reconciliation perspective. Lastly, a summary of the chapter and the researcher's personal reflections and insights are provided.

2.0 The intersection of Spirituality, Religion and Domestic Violence (a.k.a) Intimate Partner Violence

Much of the literature on spirituality, religion and DV has one thing in common—agreement that no concrete boundary exists between the formal use of the words spirituality or religion. However, Taylor (2010) makes a distinction between the two terms. Religion can be seen as organized institution with specific mores, values, beliefs, rituals. On the other hand, spirituality is concerned with a personal search for a connection with the transcendent (18-19). She contends that religion and spirituality holds both positive and negative potential to influence women's coping with their experienced of intimate partner violence (IPV), (i).

In general, family violence (domestic or intimate partner violence, sexual abuse, uttering threats, stalking, etc.) is a problem that affects all people regardless of creed, culture, race, age, social, or financial standing, (Wood & McHugh 1994; Bennett, 2005; Family Violence Initiative, 2002)³⁶. It is thus important to include all sectors of influence into any approach seeking to minimize or irradiate it. Scholarship typically does a good job of incorporating the impact of government and civil society in mitigating violence against women, but usually falls short on incorporating the religious realm in the debate.

Even among the studies that seek to address the spirituality or religious variable in women's coping, there exists a dichotomy. Some authors have said that "religious leaders' and community support for survivors may be important factors in Evangelical women's recovery process" (Ringel & Park 2008, 344; Pyles 2007, 282). While others have outlined the opposite, that "...Evangelical female survivors stayed in their abusive marriage due to their interpretation of the scriptures, believing that they were following scriptures by being submissive to their husbands", (Senter & Caldwell 2002 cited in Ringel & Park 2008, 344). The dichotomous role research has highlighted on spirituality or religion (in this case evangelical Christianity) in some women's lives might warrant further investigation to situate why it is the case.

According to Copel (2008) most women who experience victimization are at a high risk of spiritual distress (116). Moreover, their experience with "spiritual distress frequently accompanies intimate partner violence" (ibid.). She further indicates that this is evident as women in such circumstances frequently reflect on and question their spirituality, asking such questions as "why did God allow this to happen? And what is going to happen to my life?" (ibid.). It seems that neglecting a human being's spiritual nature can minimize or disregard opportunities to alleviate distress and other problems. It has been suggested that some

individuals look to their "...religion [, which] appears to provide a healing cognitive schema that enhances well-being, lowers distress, and may facilitate faster and more effective cognitive restructuring after severe loss and emotional trauma," (Weaver, et al. 1998, 270).

Conversely, when religion is examined within academic scholarship on the subject matter of women, DV, abuse, or IPV and the church, the trend is to mainly elucidate the extent to which male clergy's counseling of women (who are experiencing spousal abuse) has not been adequately addressed. As a result, some scholars have argued that religion, and religious teachings that permeate much of society on a whole, are adversely implicated in the context of abuse against women, (Wood & McHugh 1994; Chittster 1984; Pagelow & Johnson 1988; Clark 1989; Stacey & Shupe 1993 & Walker 1979). Copel (2008) also illustrated that for some women, their experience with abuse and the church's negligible response to it is a double negative.

Wood & McHugh (1994) argued that the disconnect stems from the numerous patriarchal interpretations of Judeo-Christian religious teachings that relegates women into a subservient role to male influences within the church, marriage and in society. Moreover, because some churches preach a theology that is predicated on gender inequality, some scholars assume an alarmist posture against abused women receiving counsel from clergy, particularly those reflecting patriarchal views (189). However, this is most reflected in the scholarship dated before 2000.

Similarly, Miles (1999) indicates that abused women often internalize skewed religious teachings their perpetrators use as rationalization for their abusive actions. Additionally, clergy have used biblical teachings to license men's (un-Christian) authority over women and women's submission to partners who are abusive. The result of religious rationalization is that all though

some women survive and still affirm their faith, few have indicated their faith helped them to overcome the abuse (ibid., 34). In fact, “several women have told [Miles] that responses from spiritual leaders and religious lay people have interfered with their healing process” (ibid).

The lack of spiritual support some women have encountered from church leaders and elders left them feeling devalued, powerless and lost. In turn, some felt ashamed and became alienated from themselves and their faith community. As a result, for some Christian women, they perceived their faith (values and teachings) to be a hindrance to their efforts to acquire help and escape from DV (Copel 2008,122-124).

Pyles argument is that domestic violence in some “faith based communities is paradoxically both a source of assistance and a barrier to women survivors of domestic violence” (2007, 282). He identified that among the list of barriers women face in overcoming DV (isolation, transportation, lack of resources, etc.), a lack of trained clergy can also be added to the roster, particularly in a small or rural community.

In spite of the less than helpful relationship between some conservative (typically male) clergy response to women’s experience with DV, literature also indicates “that religious institutions [do] have a critical role to play in both responding to the needs of abused victims and [to use their voice to focus on] reducing violence that characterizes so many families” (Nason-Clark 1996, 516).

A converse side also exists, because not all women have found religious institutions to be safe or supportive. The culpability of religious institutions is a noteworthy point, as they have failed to publically name violence as a sin. Their silence on the issue enables its harmful promulgation. As a result, some women have considered religious institutions to be an

ineffective resource in their struggle to address DV. Moreover, “religious beliefs and mores have been found to limit [some] women’s choices and their ability to enact resistance when violence occurs” (Taylor 2010, i). This is most evident in a religious culture that is rigid, extremist, or not open to differences that are deemed to be outside of their established norms.

In defense of religious institutions, there exist community initiatives that support shelters by offering to meet practical needs of those who use them. This can situate clergy and congregants at a supportive nexus for battered women and the facilities they rely on. Additionally, for some women, attending church can be a place where they can find healing/restoration for their spirit.

The study by Copel, (2008) in the field of social work and religion has situated the varied ways religion can be a source of spiritual support and healing for individuals who are experiencing violence. In it the “research has stressed that the theology of the Judeo-Christian tradition (among others) actually supports the safety and empowerment of battered women. For example, one can point to the Jewish concept of maintaining *shalom bayit* (peace in the home) or Christ’s model of nonviolence and love” (283). This current trend in scholarship highlights that religious teachings and clergy are making a positive impact. Researchers have revealed that for some women, religion matters and they consider it an integral element in their coping strategy. Especially, since female participants are increasing in numbers and entering clergy ministry with specific counseling training.

In terms of the new depiction of clergy, Galbraith (2005) also focused on the intersection of religion, power and abuse in the context of female clergy and the role they assume once in church office. What the research illustrates is that because a clergy is female, she is approached

for help by abused women (some who have had past negative experience with male clergy) and is seen as well situated for a relational ministry.

In this ministry, whether or not she is trained (i.e. skilled as a counsellor) to assume the role, she is expected to advise (offer moral, spiritual guidance and tangible resources) female members of her congregation and those outside of it. She is expected to be open, empathic, and a nurturing resource that guides the victims/survivors toward needed outlets. The reality is that some female clergy are both prepared and unprepared to assume this role. Overall, female clergy are making an intentional mark through their profession. They have and are using their pulpits to name the issues affecting their congregation and echo a theology free of all forms of violence.

It was previously stated that religion and spirituality can positively impact an individual's efforts to resolve life challenges in a meaningful way (Taylor, 2010). Post 2000 literature well illustrates the point that in their efforts to solve problems women have engaged their faith beliefs and teachings by engaging with three religious coping strategies, collaborative, deferring and self-directing³⁷ (Pargament, et. al. 1988, 91-92; Wang, 2007, 7-8). In terms of how a woman's religious affiliation can adversely impact her journey to escape abuse, the research also illustrates that some Christian women are more likely to experience stalking, emotional abuse and threats (Wang 2007, 30).

Whether she assumes a religious identify (conservative or liberal Christian) also impacts her decision to stay or leave an abusive relationship. For some, leaving the relationship entails doing a spiritual restructuring of thought processes to minimize guilt or shame. However, there are Christian women from conservative religious backgrounds that engage in collaborative,

deferring and self-directing religious coping in their problem solving strategy (regardless if they experience abuse or not). So it can be said, that spirituality and or religious beliefs evident in the form of adherence to teachings, religious norms or values can have an important role to play in the process of healing on the intra-personal level. This then warrants learning about the varied ways they intersect with human efforts to mitigate violence in all forms, and licences its inclusion in research that informs both academia and society.

Additionally, Taylor's work explicates that some women experienced spiritual and personal growth by reframing their experience into an opportunity to learn about themselves and the other person. This enabled them to derive more meaning in their circumstances. It appears that as spirituality became prominent in victims/survivors lives their compassion for others heightened and their ability to care for others increased. Simultaneously, this enabled learning and development in their personal relationship with the Creator. In some cases, women saw their healing from abuse as instrumental in their understanding of self-worth and strength.

2.1 Violence against First Nations women & how they cope

Much of the literature unearthed on the subject matter of violence against First Nations women illustrates that colonialism is highly implicated in the current violent context women live within (Jamieson, 1987; Stoker, 1998; Murdock, 2001; Spiwak, 2004; Deutsch, 2008; Brazier, 2006; Alani, 2010; Viel, 2005; Goudreau, 2006; Yuen, 2008 and Harper, 2011). However, Jamieson argues that any analysis employed to understand the issues needs to go beyond a reductionist (that all problems only stem from one source, colonialism) approach to fully understand the context of violence in which Aboriginal women live (1987). This is important,

because First Nations women's struggle cannot be relegated to only class, gender or racial oppression.

According to Davis (2002), when a researcher or caregiver alike communicates (utilize active listening, engage in meaningful dialogue and work toward solutions) with abuse survivors concerning their circumstances, this enables them to identify what is needed or how best to cope. Other emergent themes Davis (2002) identified are exemplified under three sections; learning to use strength/learning to survive; learning to be resilient and learning to protect self. Herein, she provides a repertoire of "inner resources". These include for example, common sense, determination, will, humor, faith, intuition/vibes, red flags/warning signs, criteria testing, love/care of self, journaling, poetry, boundaries, hoarding small amounts of money, engineering escape tactics, education, networking with other abused women, awareness of community resources, and creativity as revealed from women stories.

For some women, inner resources are used to channel their efforts and tap into external ones to enable them to survive and successfully leave abusive relationships. In fact, it was outlined that it is "these important resources that sanction survival, strength, identity formation and protection" (Davis 2002, 1259). The research also underscored the significant role spirituality played in abused women lives. Her research strongly illustrates the integral nature a positive network of influence (that can include faith teachings, a responsive faith community, family and friends) can be for the women who rely on them.

Particularly conspicuous is the universal reach of spirituality (as positive adaptation) as an inner resource that can be drawn from. Case in point, even in South Africa among the Black majority, research has illustrated that spirituality is an important coping source and is a

characteristic of family resilience (Grett and Loubser 2007, 288).³⁸ As it seems, women regardless of colour, class or creed have and could use their understanding of spirituality in various context of escaping abuse.

According to Jamieson, if women desire a cultural or traditional approach to resolving conflict, this should be weighed in on and taken seriously by the helping professionals. To this end, she acknowledges that research suggests there is a gradual push among helping professionals toward incorporating more traditional ways of coping with conflict in their approaches. This is achievable by strengthened communities with more resources. Doing so has potential to address the chronic funding crisis plaguing Aboriginal assistance (both on and off reserves). Also, Aboriginal associations and councils would in these circumstances do well to move decidedly away from a place of cultural leniency toward DV/IPV and abuse, to a greater community education to create more awareness on the issue. This will invariably strengthen women's capacity and act as a barrier against violence.

In terms of assessing the impact institutions have on abused women, Stoker (1998) illustrates that Aboriginal women were not dissatisfied with mainstream institutional mandates, per se; they are more concerned with the lack of support and protection they feel is missing when they seek assistance from them. However, she does caution against advocating for a returning back to traditional practices in or outside of institutions. For some Aboriginal women, seeking assistance from service providers has been a difficult process. Colonization's far reach is seen as still palpable into present day Aboriginal communities' perception of justice and safety. This shapes the dissatisfaction some victims of DV have with these systems.

Murdock (2001) used a standpoint analysis to identify herself in the landscape of Aboriginal women who struggled with the issue of dealing with DV. This shed much light on a different dimension (the taboo) concerning who are the perpetrators of domestic violence. Her work illustrated that intimate partner violence (IPV) is not only committed by Aboriginal men but also includes wounded Aboriginal women. She outlines that these violent Aboriginal women have been victims of a long historical trajectory of racial discrimination and social and economic oppression. Many have not developed the tools necessary to cope with anger and aggression. Furthermore, she outlined that Aboriginal women's strong mistrust of non-Aboriginal individuals and institutions appears to challenge the creation of any lasting solution to eradicate the issue of IPV.

Spiwak (2004) added an additional category of victims/survivors to the discussion. She outlined the experiences of violence against separated women in Canada. In this research it was highlighted that Aboriginal status increases the risk of separation violence, and as such Aboriginal women are at a disadvantage with respect to separation violence. Although there were multiple factors, which could lead to Aboriginal women's susceptibility toward separation violence, a higher exposure to family violence and intergenerational transmission of violence were identified as key contributing factors.

The role mainstream media sources (print, electronic and news media) play in using language and images to perpetuate gendered form of violence is well illustrated in Deutsch's (2008) research. A biased media serves only to create a culture of denial concerning the abuse initiated against Aboriginal women's bodies. By assessing two Aboriginal women artists' (Rebecca Belmore & Shelly Niro) artwork, she articulates the varied ways Aboriginal women have mounted resistance against this plot. In so doing, she begins to dismantle the biased violent

depictions the media circulates and juxtaposed them with the symbolic grassroots gestures of activism, rebellion, identity reframing and re-creation are challenging.

Using the analytical sequence of the Psychosocial Ethnography of the Commonplace (PSEC) Brazier (2006) elucidates how Aboriginal women are coping with IPV. Assessing the impact of Organisational Moments (MO) enabled her research to illustrate how some Aboriginal women manage to cope in their daily lives; particularly the multiple ways they reconcile, resolve, or cope with competing mental plans that offer meaning to their experiences of violence in their intimate relationships. Her work deduced that some Aboriginal women used socially available schemas to address five areas in their lives—institutional responses to violence, elder support, addictions, transparency and Band resource management and education. Similar to other authors, she indicates that colonialism adversely impacted the spirituality of Aboriginals in both general and specific ways.

This means that women acting from an impaired spiritual locus often only use the socially available schemas they have learnt to address the silence and inactive response they experience with institutions. This is problematic on many levels, however what is most salient is the problem of female clergy responses that protect gendered power differentials in relation to addressing the issues they face. They needed to be able to delineate the difference between good and bad elders (at the risk of experiencing intrapsychic conflict for rejecting aspects of cultural resources) to address the issue of legitimacy and credibility due to cooption of eldership in their community. They have also used addictions (alcohol, drugs, gambling, etc.) to cope.

In intimate relationships some women feel hopeless and thus don't believe change is possible; some leave their relationships, some stay in them, while others live without intimacy.

Inconsistencies in both transparency and distribution of Band resources have also led some women to become skeptical about change at the leadership level. The rhetoric of education as the key to social mobility and the tool to eradicate poverty has proved daunting in the face of real life daily struggles for survival (gaining access to food, shelter, etc.). This diminishes the hope many victims are seeking.

Documenting and discussing how Aboriginal women experience IPV while residing on a reserve is the focus of Alani's (2010) research. She engaged with the data by using a social ecological framework coupled with the '12' social determinants of health as purported by Health Canada. Her approach sought to garner from Aboriginal women's "ecosystem"—individual, interpersonal, community, institutional/organizational, and policy—what is the bigger picture.

Similar to the previous studies, her contribution to research revealed that in Aboriginal women's lives are multiple levels of oppression. Unhealthy environments and the limited resources participants have access to culminate into their experiences with severe rates of violence (physical, sexual and emotional). Consequently, many Aboriginal women mistrust the Reserve justice system and its mechanisms, as well as their own cultural sentencing circles. They have indicated that both fall short of offering appropriate justice in their behalf.

2.2 Aboriginal women, domestic violence and the pursuit of intra-personal reconciliation: the healing Journey

In Canada, Aboriginals as a group are not homogenous. There is much diversity (Cree, Ojibway, Inuit, Metis, Mohawk, etc.) and many share linguistic as well as cultural knowledge differences. To this end, Canadian Aboriginals may have varied worldviews depending on many factors, such as life experiences, region they hail from, educational background, family system

raised in, religious orientation, and sexual orientation. Interacting with Aboriginal regularly over four years has revealed that some frame notions of intra-personal reconciliation along the lines of a life-long healing journey.

Viel (2005) situates the role health plays in Aboriginal women's lives. By engaging the medicine wheel conceptual model of holistic health and underscoring the twelve determinants of health as generated by Health Canada, she outlines the central tenants motivating women to pursue the good life for themselves and community. Her fieldwork reveals that it is first imperative to know Aboriginal definitions health. Some Aboriginal women define health in terms of their faith, social equality, healthy partner relationships and strong community leadership. Essentially, spirituality is a significant component in their conception of holistic health as is the physical, emotional and intellectual.

Moreover, she contends that because some researchers (non-Aboriginal, western, middle class, white female/male) often diminish or relegate as unimportant the significant role spirituality plays in impacting Aboriginal women's health physically, emotionally, and intellectually, it is fundamentally important that when identified, spirituality be factored into meaningful, new analysis in relation to Aboriginal women's lives.

The notion of spirituality void of religious overtones can be used as a culturally appropriate resource to assist some Aboriginal women in conflict (Goudreau, 2006). Using a Circle of Life/Medicine Wheel with an Aboriginal Women's hand drumming (AWHD) adaption she underscores how some Aboriginal women (co-researchers) engaged the traditional activity of drumming to awake, enhance, and explore their spirituality. Her work offers an alternative view of spirituality in non-religious terms and focuses on notions of healing. For some Aboriginal

women, participating in a hand drumming group enables them to find security, belonging, hope, trust, freedom, creativity and wellness.

There are a disproportionate number of Aboriginal women who are Federally Sentenced (FSW). Yuen's (2008) research assessed how these marginalized, and deemed triple deviants, are working to culturally unweave themselves from a web of violence. Her work demonstrates the extent to which in spite of the violence that surrounds many female inmates, while incarcerated, many have been able to pursue healing, empowerment and recreation through culturally relevant means. For some, this was not possible outside of prison. While incarcerated, some women became knowledgeable and involved with traditional ceremonies and cultural gatherings such as sweat lodges, drumming circles and smudging ceremonies. This afforded individuals culturally relevant options to pursue their own choice of healing. This journey toward inner freedom encompasses a spiritual component as much as a physical, emotional and mental progression.

Resilience from an Aboriginal epistemological standpoint is a central part in understanding how healing can be interpreted among Aboriginal women survivors of DV (Harper, 2011). Her work contributes to the collective decolonization effort of Aboriginal peoples by Aboriginals. Rooted in the indigenous notion that the spirit is the core of the self, and capturing how the spirit enables one to get back up again (bounce back), the idea is that resilience is a positive adaptation following experience with adversity. Harper adds to the debate that for Aboriginals, spirituality has a significant role to play in the health and life of the community as a whole, and specifically survivors of DV. Through proper spiritual education, and counselling, women are able to be encouraged, become self-aware, self-confident and engender healing.

2.3 Reflections: Initial engagement

Following the survey of literature (Canadian MA's & Ph.D.'s) I learnt that varied research exists on this subject matter. I was pleased to see that of the academic studies reviewed, three (Viel 2005, Goudreau, 2006 & Harper, 2011) were written by women who identified themselves as Canadian First Nation's scholars. Three (Yuen, 2008, Wang, 2007 & Alani, 2010) were identified in their writing as visible minorities and the rest were completed by non-identified visible minorities or authors who did not disclose their nationality. The First Nations and minority authors seem to resonate more extensively with the notion that individual experiences (good or bad) that affect the whole community and therefore require a pragmatic community response.

It was interesting to see that the Non-Aboriginal female(perhaps Caucasian)writers engaged in the debates on DV/IPV with varied reflexivity tones. This gave deeper meaning to the notion that researchers can be intentional about connecting with others by doing meaningful research. Doing this type of research has the potential to impact the spiritual journey of researcher, volunteers, and the academic readership alike.

Although each author framed the subject of DV from varied contexts (abuse, IPV, wife abuse, violence, etc.), they all still captured the same essence of the issue – that domestic violence is not a static experience and that Aboriginal women encounter it at high rates. It intersects with a multiplicity of factors.

Additionally, what was most salient from the literature review was the realization that many people are acting or reacting adversely to life events or seeking to positively create something new within them from a position of loss. This is in relation to experiences from infancy, childhood, adolescence or adulthood. The author's generally assert that it is possible for one or multiple events of violence to diminish or hinder one's access to spirituality or spiritual available resources.

Taylor's (2010) exploration of the concepts of love and hope resonated with me, and has left me questioning: Where does the love that conquers all derive from? What hope can marginalized people take from their life events, mishaps, challenges and opportunities? Is hope then something taken from an abstract place or something innate that challenging circumstances can motivate?

Perhaps, hope is what fuels spirituality and people's religious beliefs and why it is they are sometimes employed in coping processes. How then is our individual will implicated in spirituality and religious beliefs? I want to know more. Perhaps the four participant's experiences will shed some light on this.

2.4 Summary

There are multiple ways to depict the reality of violence Aboriginal women experience. However, the trend in recent research is to focus on theoretical approaches that offer holistic explanations and purport minimal risk to the participants. The burgeoning academic literature purports various frameworks, Psychosocial Ethnography of the Commonplace (PSEC), Social Ecological Theory Circle of Life and the Medicine Wheel.

Religion, religious institutions and clergy (particularly, men leaders) have been identified by some women to be limiting their capacity to escape from DV. Many have situated the adverse historical legacy of colonialism and its use of missionaries at the root of this violence, of which Aboriginal women experience the brunt. Thus, some have argued that religious teachings limit women's options.

Some scholars have identified religion, religious institutions, clergy and compassionate lay people as positive first points of contact, or conduits for change in abused women's experiences. Traditional aboriginal cultural ceremonies are proving to be helpful to some Aboriginal women, and for others, belonging to faith based (Christian) communities prove

helpful. Wherein women adhere to specific Traditional or Christian norms, values, teachings, beliefs or rituals they enable them to generate better coping strategies to address conflicts.

Religious coping (collaborative, deferring and self-directing) is central to some Aboriginal women's world view. The converse side to religious coping is that it can misguide depending on the interpretations of teachings some women rely on. This is said to increase some women's susceptibility to abuse. Notwithstanding, religious coping enables others to deepen their spirituality and enable them to pursue healing both on inter and intra personal levels.

What is needed to address issues is the strengthening of communities, by educating both females and males on how to effectively meet needs in the family structure. Additionally, to alleviate chronic funding issues, as well as when it necessitates, promote the incorporation of traditional ways of coping. When mainstream institutions provide safety and support to Aboriginal women, they are more likely to use their available services. Being culturally sensitive in programs can be a factor that increases their reliance on mainstream services. This builds trust between Aboriginal women and mainstream services such as shelters, police services and health care providers.

Although violence can be gendered, perpetrators of violence can be both female and male. Finding solutions to eradicate IPV/DV or abuse requires an integrative approach to inter and intra personal conflict reductions and eradication. How society views Aboriginal women through print and news media also plays a role in how they experience violence. Thus, a re-education (decolonization) of these information media should lead to rejecting violent depictions of Aboriginal women. This can contribute to the identity reframing and re-creation that is

needed for Aboriginal women and strengthen the inherent value society places on Aboriginal women.

Health for Aboriginals encompasses many facets. Integrating a holistic approach to health along with the Health Canada's twelve determinants of health has illustrated that some Aboriginal women are regaining and creating healthy outcomes for themselves and community. Central to this is the interrelation of their faith (considered to varying degrees as spirituality), social equality, healthy partners and strong community leadership.

Learning about cultural traditions and ceremonies has proved to be beneficial to some Aboriginal women's health. Aboriginal women incarcerated as well as everyday women in communities all over Canada are engaging with traditional ceremonies, and traditions (hand or drumming circle, smudging ceremonies, Sweat Lodges, pow-pows, etc.) to help them become familiar with the healing aspects of their culture.

Chapter Three:

Theoretical lens

3.0 Statement of method and procedure

In this chapter there are three main areas divided into two sections (A- theoretical, B- practical research methodology). The first section provides a description of the theoretical or conceptual framework. The second provides a brief examination of the sources and authority that best outlines how this research seeks to interpret and analyze the data. Then it outlines the analytical techniques and discusses the research design. At the end of each section, the researcher reflects on the process.

The research goal is to provide an understanding about a particular group of women (Aboriginal women) from a specific (remote) geographical location (Sioux Lookout Zone) concerning how they survived domestic violence (DV), in particular, the extent to which spirituality and or religious beliefs play a role in their experiences.

There are four research questions driving the process: how does spirituality or religious belief affect First Nations women who experience DV? What exactly are the religious or spiritual resources they draw from? When do these come into play? What are the nuances of this in relation to other factors in their lives? What these questions seek to reveal is how some female members from a minority group engage their faith and beliefs to mitigate the effect of violence they experience.

The research employed a qualitative two pronged, blended theoretical approach. Beginning with Grounded Theory (GT), it first used GT to engage in a conversation (in one-on-one interviews) in an opened ended way to garner how women talk about their experiences and how they interpret them (find meaning from them). Second, analyzed the GT results (what the

participants have said about their experiences) from the perspective of the thirteen tenants of reconciliation— according to Redekop's (2002a) in the theory of Mimetic Structures of Blessings.

Additionally, the process included examining the new meaning emergent from the GT data with previous literature on the subject matter. Methodologically, the research was completed by using both primary and secondary sources, to ascertain previous literature— through electronic databases search engines, Newspapers, Journal articles, Books, Reports, MA Theses and Ph.D. Dissertation. Other data bases consulted were First Nations Periodical Index, Native Social Work Journal, Canadian Journal of Native Studies, Theses Canada, ProQuest-Databases, Journal of Religion and Health and Scholars Portal. Using all of these search engines field search—Keyword, Title, Phrases, and Authors, the topic search focused mainly on Canadian works regarding domestic violence, intimate partner violence, abuse, religion, spirituality and First Nations, Native, Aboriginal and women.

By employing a constructivist approach to Grounded Theory (GT) the researcher gleaned more closely the true essence of the four participant's experiences. Using open, axial and selective coding enabled the knowledge from the categorized data to reveal seven universal themes and sixty one sub-themes. This made meaning visible and intelligible.

In form, the research data process emerged from two one-on-one semi structured interviews over a period of six to eight months. Two interviews were deemed necessary to first listen to the stories and second have a reflective discussion about the way the participants have engaged with the new knowledge they acquired since they began to pursue the process of intra-personal reconciliation.

The research evolved within a context of its own timing (three years), and the process transpired when both research participants and researcher were ready to be vulnerable and transparent. The participants were first self-selected upon the invitation to participate and second the researcher used random and purposive (judgmental sampling) to establish the most appropriate (individuals who were already engaging in the process of healing from DV that occurred before 2008) case study fit. Thus, there was a strong element of the unpredictable in the selection process.

The research unfolded in two ways as a concurrent journey. For this reason an applied reflexivity—heuristic methodology approach was employed to document the researcher’s experiences. The use of a heuristic approach lends itself to an additional dimension of meaning making. It allowed the researcher (Self) to be present throughout the research, through an exercise in “active reflexivity”³⁹ in sections titled ‘reflections’. While understanding emerges from the researcher’s work on the phenomenon, she also experiences growth, self-awareness, and self-knowledge as the six main phases (initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis) of heuristic research were engaged.

Redekop’s (2002a) conception of reconciliation and Mimetic Structures of Blessing served as the principle foundation for assessing how the women have pursued the healing journey they set out to accomplish. By examining the layers of relational systems at play in both the mapped DV& Intra personal reconciliation exercise (using a Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) tool), by using both a “descriptive” and “comparative explanations”⁴⁰ sight and insight were derived.

The research created the space for the inclusion of minority women's voices; a minority woman initiating a dialogue about and other minority women. This encompassed situating herself (using emic & etic views) from a heuristically reflexive, black feminist standpoint to outline how her multiple identities engaged in the research process.

Human experience around coping constructively with violence is very complex. Hence, there is a need for a combined approach that is very open and flexible so as to not hastily fit experiences tightly into a mold that is not a good fit. Also, what are needed are well developed theories to make sense of concepts and relationship that raw data generate. With this in mind, the notion of a blended theory refers to the use of a combination of multiple theoretical lenses that best capture the emergent meaning the preliminary data informed.

Criticisms of the qualitative research approach could question the issue of subjectivity and generalizability. However, more so than positivist or critical approaches, the interpretive does lend itself to richer in-depth, one-on-one interview. The sample population (four women) is small. However, the research does not seek to make grandiose generalizations about all First Nations women in Canada. Instead, the study focuses on providing an in depth understanding first provide by the participants— who were self-selected and second, from a particular nationality (First Nations) and how they interacted with the resources available to them in the regional environment (Sioux Lookout zone in northwestern Ontario) they hailed from.

The three subsequent sections will highlight the ways in which a qualitative approach to research is best served by using elements of constructivist Grounded Theory, Heuristic and Mimetic Structures of Blessings to “see”, hear, and be impacted about the core of some Aboriginal women's experiences. Herein what is mainly being assessed is how the participants

used their understanding of spirituality and religious beliefs to inform their coping strategies. Also to assess how they extrapolate meaning from these events to initiate intra-personal (self) reconciliation/change (healing).

Part A— Theoretical Methodology

Conflict resolution theorist Redekop noted that “the word “theory” is derived from the Greek verb, *theoreo*, meaning “to see, perceive or notice” (2001, 10). Furthermore, he states that “good theories help us [to] “see” important realities that may be present in a given situation” (9). Additionally, “theory around deep-rooted conflict should help those caught up in conflicts understand their experience and help people longing for peace to discover new possibilities for its actualization” (13).

3.0.1 Grounded Theory (GT)-An Overview

Grounded Theory (GT) was created by Sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss 1965, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss 1987. Their seminal work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) advocated the development of theories from research grounded in data as opposed to deducing it from testable hypotheses by using existing theories, and for the purpose of its intended use (Glaser & Anselm, 1967; Charmaz, 2004, 2006). GT is classified as a qualitative research methodology. GT “allows [the] researchers to access the inner experience of participants and to determine how meanings are formed in and through culture,” Corbin, & Strauss, 2008 in Harper 2011, 37.

According to Barney Glaser & Anselm Strauss (1967; 1995; 1999) Grounded Theory (GT) “is the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (2010, 2). It initially emerged from the authors’ exploration of “analytical ideas in long conversations

and [the exchange of] preliminary notes analysing observations in the field” (Charmaz, 2006, 4).

The overarching goal of GT is depicted in the quotation below:

... only God can tell infallible humans the “real” nature of reality... human grasp of reality can never be that of God’s, but hopefully research moves us increasingly toward greater understanding of how the world works. (Strauss & Corbin 1998, 4)

Central to this research are theses written by authors Galbraith, 2005; Taylor, 2010 and Harper, 2011, who most instructively used GT as their methodological or theoretical foundation. The way these three authors have used GT methodology to afford the research participants (Aboriginal women) an opportunity to best communicate, in their own words, how they have and continue to cope with DV, is pragmatic.

3.0.2 Why use GT?

There are many reasons to pursue research using a GT methodological approach. However, a researcher’s decision to use GT can be important because it enables a “... particular way of thinking about data” (Morse 2009, 13). Inductive thinkers are temperamentally suited for this type of research, others are well versed in a particular discipline that is oriented toward it, or based on the delicate nature of the research problem the approach is most suited. Additionally, Morse notes that “grounded theory, particularly when used with a symbolic interactionist theoretical lens, enables not only the documentation of change within social groups, but understanding of the core processes central to that change” (2009, 13). Furthermore, GT “...allows us to explicate what is *going on* or *what is happening* (or *has happened*) within a setting or around a particular event” (ibid., 14).

Doing GT research demanded a strong degree of emotional and social intelligence integrated within the analytical approaches in order to establish immediate rapport and trust

during the interviewing stage. These capacities are more pronounced in the researcher's tool kit. Thus, GT best enables her to embark on research, fieldwork or life work that lends itself to first learn about "what people are doing and thinking" (ibid.) and has the best potential to capture the 'nuances of human living' (ibid., 28) while enabling the researcher to capitalize on her knowledge base to better comprehend the interested phenomenon.

Amidst all the dynamic potential of GT in qualitative research, two instructive elements are foundational for the research herein. First, the stance it espouses on the development of theoretical lens, that literature is used to enhance as oppose to constrain theory development. As "theory derived from data is more likely to resemble the "reality", (Strauss, & Corbin 1998, 12). Secondly, it enables both a critical as well as an open creative thinking process (ibid.,13).

3.0.3 What is significant about GT?

Classical GT is concerned with the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research (Glaser & Strauss 2010, 2). It is in this method of data collection that analysis and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another. Thus, theory derived from the study of a phenomenon that is not generated 'a priori', is inductively arrived at (Ibid., 3). As Corbin & Strauss, 1990 contend, "data for a grounded theory can come from various sources... anything that may shed light on the question under study" (5). To this end, "the research process itself guides the researcher toward examining all of the possibly rewarding avenues to understanding" (ibid., 6).

According to Charmaz (2006), a second wave of GT theorists is Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) and Corbin and Strauss 1990 (8). They are accredited with moving GT from its classical stance "toward verification..." as a result of their focus on "new technical procedures

rather than emphasizing the comparative methods that distinguished earlier grounded theory strategies” (ibid., 8). Some others are Morse, Janice; Stern, N. Phyllis; Bowers, Barbara; Clarke, Adele 2009.⁴¹ It has been established that there are basically three elements of GT; concepts, categories and propositions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990)⁴². Another noteworthy scholar (perhaps a third wave GT generator) who contributed to the post Glaser & Strauss (1967) construction of GT is the research of Charmaz (2004; 2006). She outlines the defining components of GT in practice as follows:

Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis

Constructing analytical codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses

Using the constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis

Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis

Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps

Sampling aimed toward theory construction, not for population representativeness

Conducting the literature review after developing an independent analysis
(Charmaz 2006, 5)

Charmaz is referred to as a constructivist grounded theorist and her methodological approach is deemed an interpretive one. Her main GT argumentation put forth is that “...we can use basic theory guidelines with twenty-first century methodological assumptions and approaches” (ibid, 9). In so doing, the researcher accepts the invitation from Glaser and Strauss (1967) to “use grounded theory strategies flexibly in their own way” (ibid.). Charmaz indicates that GT methods are a flexible “set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages” (ibid), and so it “can complement other approaches to qualitative data analysis, rather than stand in opposition to them” (ibid).

According to Strauss and Corbin, “doing microanalysis is an important step in theory development. It is through careful scrutiny of data, line-by-line, that researchers are able to uncover new concepts and novel relationships and to systematically develop categories in terms of their properties and dimensions” (1998, 71). This leads to the second relevant aspect of GT, the dynamic and fluid process of coding.

There are three types of coding; open, axial and selective coding. For Charmaz, coding is “categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data. Your codes show how you select, separate, and sort data to begin an analytic accounting of them” (2006, 43). It is through what Charmaz terms the “pivotal link between collecting data and developing emergent theory to explain these data” (ibid., 46) that definitions and meaning can be derived.

Coding for Strauss and Corbin (1998) consists of five things; To “build rather than test theory; provide researchers with analytic tools for handling masses of raw data; help analysts to consider alternative meanings of phenomena; be systematic and creative simultaneously, and identify, develop, and relate concepts that are the building blocks of theory” (ibid., 13).

Coding is important for the interpretation of data relies heavily on the process of grouping emergent themes to see what picture they present about the participant’s stories. The interview data can then be viewed through “open-coding” (OC). OC is “the analytical process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (ibid., 101). It is a line-by-line examination that relevant themes can be found.

Also, coding can be accomplished through an axial approach—“axial coding” (AC). By this it is meant that “the process of relating categories to their subcategories along the lines of

their properties and dimensions” (ibid., 124). This helps to identify and group the connections between concepts derived from categories and sub-categories.

Coding can also be selective. Selective coding (SC) is “the process of integrating and refining the theory” (ibid., 143). The process of integration is ongoing throughout the research. It represents the duelling interaction between analyst and the data (ibid., 144). This process invariably leads to a central category that connects all others to it.

This research relies on elements of all three forms of coding (open, axial, and selective) to group, relate and integrate themes into a foundational synthesis (meta-theory) that creatively exposes a theory based on the lived experiences of the participants. Outlined below are some thoughts on the researcher’s motives for employing GT in the research methodology.

3.0.4 Reflections: Initial Engagement

Not knowing where I would end up yet compelled to follow

I felt that in keeping with the research goal to learn from the research participants how they cope with DV, it was imperative to take cues from what they have said and then return to literature for the purpose of comparing how others (Aboriginal women who have experienced DV or IPV) are similar or different to them.

This was a strong compulsion. Yet, I needed some guidance as to how best to anchor this process. So, in a thesis meeting (spring 2010) with my Supervisor, I described to him what was transpiring within the research process and within my head, and following this discussion, he suggested looking at incorporating Grounded Theory formally.

Additionally, this approach served to spiritually open me up as a researcher. As I actively pursued finding out what research was previously completed, each one left bibliographical clues on where else to seek more knowledge on the subject matter (whether to reframe, expand or narrow the title search in thesis electronic data bases). It was indeed a blend of following an academic and an unseen guiding hand.

Not knowing where I would end up, it took a lot of belief and trust that inherent in the process are important links needed to be made as a result of reading previous research; and that everything would work together for the good of understanding the whole picture.

3.1.0 Heuristic Research

An Overview

In his book, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology and Applications*, leading American expert on humanistic and clinical Psychology, Clark Moustakas stated that “the root meaning of *heuristic* comes from the Greek work *heuriskein*, meaning to discover or to find” (1990, 9). According to Moustakas the word heuristic:

... [It] refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. Heuristic processes incorporate creative self-processes and self-discoveries. The process of discovery leads investigators, but also to realizations relevant to their own experiences and lives. (9)

In this approach, the aim is to investigate human experience which “incorporates creative self-processes and [that can lead to] self-discoveries” (ibid., 9). The seminal works that gave birth to this methodological process are *Loneliness* (Moustakas, 1961) and carried on in *Loneliness and Love* (1972) and *The Touch of Loneliness* (Moustakas, 1975).

3.1.1 What is Heuristic research?

For Moustakas (1990), the art of “concentrated gazing” on something that attracts or compels one in research to ultimately find meaning and understanding can emerge from a dynamic and creative process. Below, he explicates how he created this process and termed it heuristic:

The Heuristic process is a way of being informed, a way of knowing. Whatever presents itself in the consciousness of the investigator as perception, sense, intuition, or knowledge represents an invitation for further elucidation. What appears, what shows itself, casts a light that enables one to come to know more

fully what something is and means. In such a process not only is knowledge extended but the self of the researcher is illuminated. (10)

The fruitful nature of engaging in the process of Heuristic methodology is challenging but boasts many rewards.

To this end, Moustakas (1990) indicates that “I in the process of a heuristic search, ... may challenge, confront, or even doubt my understanding of a human concern or issue; but when I persist in a disciplined and devoted way I ultimately deepen my knowledge of the phenomenon” (ibid.,11). Thus, an emphasis is placed on the researcher’s “...internal frame of reference, self- searching, intuition and indwelling [all of which] lies at the heart of heuristic inquiry” (ibid., 12).

It is important to note, that this research is a journey. A journey embarked upon in a sense because of the researcher’s impression to respond to a “call.” A push that emerges from within the researcher’s own life experiences. It is something to which there exists “associations and fleeting awareness’s but whose nature is largely unknown” (ibid.,13).

The essence of heuristic methodology is to tell a story that depicts the characteristics that exist in a universal experience and derive meaning from it. It is then by engaging “through an unwavering and steady inward gaze and inner freedom to explore and accept *what is*, I am researching into deeper and deeper regions of a human problem or experience and coming to know and understand its underlining dynamics and constituents more and more fully” (ibid.).

The heuristic process is a demanding one as what is being developed is two-fold. In this process, “I am not only lifting out the essential meanings of an experience, but I am actively awakening and transforming my own self. Self-understanding and self-growth occur simultaneously in heuristic discovery” (ibid.).

There are six phases to this type of research. They are; “initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination of the research in [to] a creative synthesis” (ibid., 27). According to Moustakas, phase I entails a beginning point from within the researcher. Therein, it presents itself as:

...a topic, theme, problem, or question that represents a critical interest and area of research. The task of the initial engagement is to discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications. The initial engagement invites self-dialogue, an inner search to discover the topic and question. During this process one encounters the self, one’s autobiography, and significant relationships within a social context. (Moustakas 1990, 27)

In the second phase, immersion is established once the question is identified and related terms have been clarified and defined. The emphasis is now on the researcher living with the question of interest. “Everything in his or her life becomes crystalized around the question. This immersion process enables the researcher to come to be on intimate terms with the question—to live it, and grow in knowledge and understanding of it” (ibid., 28). Furthermore, at this juncture the life of the researcher is a dual experience, defined more in the follow quote:

The researcher is alert to all possibilities for meaning and enters fully into life with others wherever the theme is being expressed or talked about—in public settings, in social contexts, or in professional meetings. Virtually anything connected with the question becomes raw material for immersion, for staying with, and for maintaining a sustained focus and concentration. People, places, meetings, readings, nature—all offer possibilities for understanding the phenomenon. Primary concepts for facilitating the immersion process include spontaneous self-dialogue and self-searching, pursuing intuitive clues or hunches, and drawing from the mystery and sources of energy and knowledge within the tacit dimension. (Moustakas 1990, 28)

This part in the heuristic research process, initially takes your breath away. Yet, it also breathes life back into the researcher by creating a strong need to know more from multiple sources and mode of operation.

The incubation phase is a period of time wherein the saying ‘patience in a virtue’ is operationalized. In this period of time, there is a retreat from living with and from concentration on the research question. Furthermore;

Although the researcher is moving on a totally different path, detached from involvement with the question and removed from awareness of its nature and meanings, on another level, expansion of knowledge is taking place. During this process the researcher is no longer absorbed in the topic in any direct way or alert to things, situations, events, or people that will contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, growth is taking place. This period of incubation enables the inner tacit dimension to reach its full possibilities. (Moustakas 1990, 28)

It is during this physical absence from the research that tacit knowledge and intuition work in tandem to emerge clarification and enable understanding or new perspectives of the phenomenon.

At the illumination phase, what is most relevant is the opening up of the researcher, which is expected to have occurred naturally. In a sense, it is a “breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and a clustering of qualities into themes inherent in the question” (ibid., 29). The process unfolds as such:

The illumination process may be an awakening to new constituents of the experience, thus adding new dimensions of knowledge. Or, the illumination may involve corrections of distorted understandings or disclosure of hidden meanings. When the researcher is in a receptive state of mind without conscious striving or concentration, the insight or modification occurs. A degree of reflectiveness is essential, but the mystery of situations requires tacit workings to uncover meanings and essences. (Moustakas 1990, 29)

This part of the process is referred to as a gateway to new awareness. Herein, what can take shape is “a modification of an old understanding, a synthesis of fragmented knowledge, or an altogether new discovery of something that has been present for some time yet beyond immediate awareness” (ibid., 30). Information that has been “missed, misunderstood, or

distorted realities that make their appearance and add something essential to the truth of an experience” (ibid.) thus culminates into creative discovery.

At the explication phase what is illuminated are “themes, qualities, and components of a topic or question” (ibid., 30). The gist is to “fully examine what has awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers of meaning” (ibid., 31). The researcher draws from methods such as “focusing, indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure, and recognizes that meanings are unique and distinctive to an experience and depend upon internal frames of reference” (ibid.).

This is the point where concentrated effort is placed on “creating an inward space and discovering nuances, textures, and constituents of the phenomenon which may then be more fully elucidated through indwelling” (ibid.). The core or dominate themes have emerged at this stage, so the researcher is now faced with “a comprehensive depiction of the essences of the experience” (ibid.). Now, the researcher is ready to assembly the whole experience.

Finally, at the creative synthesis a through familiarization with the “constituents, qualities, and themes” from the data must be acquired. At this point what is central is “the tacit dimension, intuition, and self-searching” which usually takes the form of a creative gaze “poem, story, drawing, painting or by some other creative form” (ibid. 32). At this point, the researcher has to move beyond the confines of the data itself, and allow for an “inward life on the question to grow, in such a way that a comprehensive expression of the essences of the phenomenon investigated is realized” (ibid.).

Moustakas summed up this part of the process as the “behaviour [that] is governed and experience[d] is determined by the unique perceptions, feelings, intuitions, beliefs, and

judgements housed in the internal frame of reference of a person. [Therefore it is because] meanings are inherent in a particular world view, an individual life, and the connections between self, other and world” (ibid.). If research is to make sense, there must constantly be an interaction guided by the use of a heuristic lens.

3.1.2 Why a Heuristic lens?

While engaging in grounded theory fieldwork, and reflecting on how it is unfolding both academically and personally, it became apparent ‘*a posteriori*’ that this methodology could be an asset in the analytical process. Doing research and realizing my personal experiences enable an indwelling understanding of the particular phenomenon, has made the inclusion of heuristic research a significant fit. Also, other strong factors that encourage the inclusion of this approach are listed below;

... [it is] because heuristic research emphasizes connectedness and relationships. [it] lends itself to depiction of essential meanings and portrayal of the intrigue and personal significance that imbue the search to know.

.... [it] involve[s] reintegration of derived knowledge that itself is an act of creative discovery, a synthesis that includes intuition and tacit understanding.

The participants remain visible in the examination of the data and continue to be portrayed as whole persons (Moustakas, 1990 cited in Molina, 1999, 52)

To formally acknowledge that there is unfolding a heuristic process in the research means that it can be openly examined for its potential to reveal insights on the subject matter.

According to Moustakas the researcher in heuristic research “must have a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated. There must have been actual autobiographical connections” to “engage the full range of self-resources” (1990, 14). This process does not necessarily unfold in a predictable timing. In fact, the process “is not one that can be hurried or timed by the clock or calendar. It demands the total presence, honesty,

maturity, and integrity of a researcher who not only strongly desires to know and understand but is willing to commit endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration on one central question, to risk the opening of wounds and passionate concerns, and to undergo the personal transformation that exists as a possibility... ." (ibid)

3.1.3 Reflections: Immersion &Incubation

Moving from academic insecurity to academic maturity

When the prospect of pursuing a thesis came before me, in many ways I experienced trepidation, Even though I greatly aspire to learn, I felt physically and intellectually limited. My own personal life— I am a Home Maker, to care for my toddler and not possessing a lot of spare time to dedicate to the pursuit of academic knowledge; as well as having no access to an institutional framework — such as an MA thesis seminar or study group to engage with others doing similar work created a context of internal pressure. I had to thus primarily rely on two resources, my thesis Supervisor and myself. In reality, I sought from my Supervisor academic direction, but did not engage him with personal questions regarding ways of knowing.

In my internal grappling, I questioned myself as such; what is it that I know? How do I know it? Where did I learn it? How did I learn it? In asking these questions, I began to realize that there was disconnect in the foundation of what I know and how it has been academically measured up to this point. Perceiving this helped me realize that my academic spirit (my true academic voice) is wounded. I was reluctant to talk about my indwelling knowledge out of fear it

would not be considered academic. However, coming to terms with the notion that what I know from my experiences does have and can play a legitimate role in how I experience the research process proved to be liberating. Furthermore, to be able to complete this MA I would need to balance by reconciling the qualitative academic approach and my true academic voice in a qualitatively measureable way to enable academic self-actualization. The result of which would hopefully enable me to confidently engage within academic life and beyond post MA acquisition.

Realizing this helped me to better grapple with how best I can and have learnt as I interact with how others also have learnt. In this research process, I am learning on multiple levels (experiential, relationally and critically) while honoring the subject the learning is concerned with. This likely movement from arrested academic development into a mature learned space is a journey with implications on multiple levels (personally, professionally and spiritually).

Becoming aware of this serves as an important caveat to "tread softly" as I research about how others arrive at what they know. Also, I am keeping in mind that how other researchers or individuals experience life and have expressed it in their speech and or writing, can illustrate many things; and that not even the least of this should be reducible to what is and is not termed legitimate academic knowledge. This is important because truth can be captured not just as it relates to universal, empirical data but from all relational aspects of life. Henceforth, heuristic research affords me the opportunity to be true to myself and honor what I already know. As

well as respectfully engage by using open-ended questions to uncover what I don't already know to create a new understanding.

3.2.0 Mimetic Structures of Blessings

An Overview:

Vern Neufeld Redekop, internationally renowned conflict resolution theoretician, and Professor of Conflict Studies, at the Saint Paul University has extensively written on the subject matter of deep-rooted conflict and reconciliation. His seminal work *From Violence to Blessing: How an understanding of deep-rooted conflict can open paths to reconciliation* (2002a) presents how theory has the capacity to provide revelation in conflicts, be they international, interpersonal or intra-personal in nature. Reflecting on what he most wants his seminal book to do, he noted “ultimately, my hope is that the ideas developed in this book will inform the basis for understanding to promote healing and action to open new possibilities for human relationships” (13). At the very core of Redekop’s theory are wisdom and knowledge that can impart understanding.

The theoretical lens Redekop’s used illustrates how layers of complex relational systems can reveal sight, insight and hope to those who seek it. He contends “that much of deep-rooted conflict is about what happens within the human person.” Also, it is from within “...each person’s interior world ... [that] ideas, memories, passions, desires, and emotions” [emanates] (2002a, 12). Redekop framed in detailed how conflicts (on all levels, international, inter-personal and intra-personal), violence and reconciliation develop and are perpetuated in relational systems⁴³ that often take on a life of their own. Accordingly, having access to “... good theory gives the vocabulary and conceptual framework to understand our experiences” (13).

Mimetic Structures of Blessing are the opposite response to Mimetic Structures of Violence. To Redekop, human beings have identity needs. Each person has the need for meaning, connectedness, security, recognition, and action, all of which revolve around the self (31). These identity needs are to be satisfied respectively as they enable wellness. These needs are not static; they change through time (50). A person's emotions are also implicated in this process. Redekop states, "if the threat to human needs is sufficiently intense, the emotional impact reaches the point of trauma" (55). To this end, lack of fulfilled needs also can lead into intra personal conflict.

It is because our identity is implicated between the dialectic needs, and the corresponding satisfier why "our identities are built on things that bring together mind, emotion and spirit" (83). Hence, the assertion that characteristic of a strong autonomous individual is one who possesses "self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-recognizance, self-awareness, self-confidence, self-respecting and self-actualizing" (ibid.). Incidentally, these are not always present in anyone person at all times. When need satisfiers are not met, and people have a potent desire "about something that they will do anything in their power to acquire" (83) a threat is perceived.

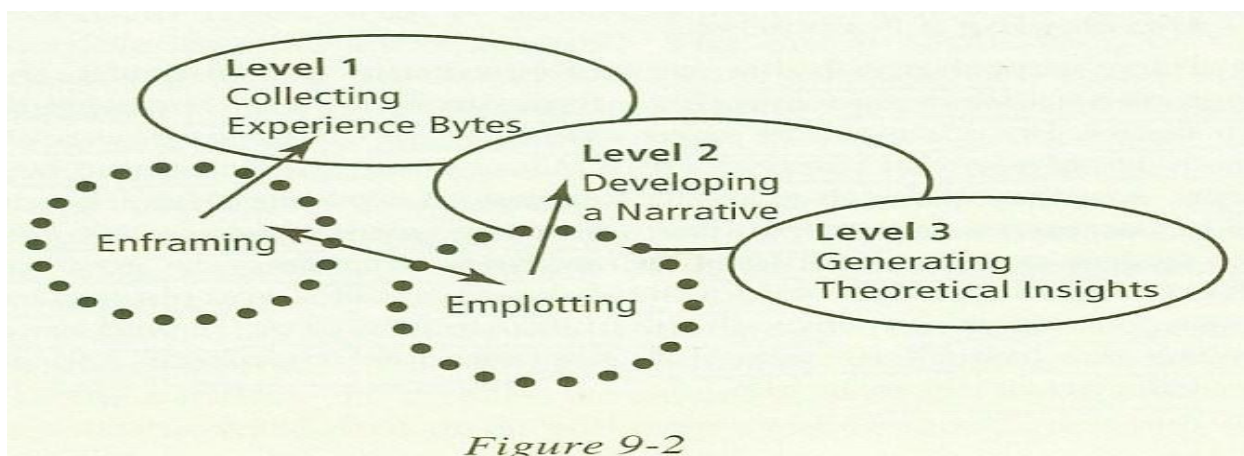
For Redekop, relational systems are mimetic in nature. By mimetic, he means imitative. This mimetic concept is borrowed from Rene Girard work on mimesis⁴⁴. Within each person is a mimetic nature and this expresses itself as mimetic desire. Below, the context of mimetic nature and the self is described:

...we form our sense of what we long to become mimetically. We chose Models to imitate. From them we pick up clues about the satisfiers necessary to meet our needs for meaning, action, connectedness, security, and recognition. These models contribute to the way we frame our stories from the past and how we imagine our future, they set the standards for what we want in terms of growth and continuity (Redekop 2002a, 64).

The interaction then moves into mimetic desire, wherein “all people are caught up with mimetic desire. For the self, Model is the Other who inspires a desire for something. The desire may be for a physical object, a relationship, prestige, honour, a skill, recognition, status, life condition, or sex” (ibid., 66-67). Herein, what is most important is not whether the Model actually desires the object but that it is perceived as being desired. Girard (1965) in Redekop notes that “the mediator’s prestige is imparted to the object of desire and confers upon it an illusory value” (2002a, 67). The movement in this system culminates into mimetic rivalry, mimetic doubling and then conflict within relational systems (ibid.).

Redekop uses the context of hermeneutics to highlight two important processes, enframing and emplotting that are important for an interpreter or mediator engaged with any deep rooted conflict. Through their role, one enframing – “identifies the relational systems at play in the conflict” (181), and two emplotting – “unlocks the narrative structure of the conflict” (182), can help the party or parties in conflict to see the circumstances in a different way.

From a diagrammatic perspective this is what is transpiring (183). In the diagram 3.4.1 below, referred to as unlocking the Structure of Conflict from Redekop (2002a, 183);



the underlying message is that “theoretical tools must work in one’s own experience” (186). Using these tools can enable one (researcher, helping professional, etc.) with the clearer sight required to be a useful conduit of encouragement to individuals in conflict. Theoretical tools are similar to spiritual teachings. They can be positive instruments that provide aid to one seeking a way out of conflict.

3.2.1 What are Mimetic Structures of Blessing?

In true heuristic form, the development of mimetic structures of blessing followed the creation of the concept of mimetic structures of violence (255). Below, Redekop provides is rational for developing the concept:

I developed the concept of mimetic structure of blessing after I had analyzed the Oka/Kanehsata:ke Crisis. I had a sense of awe at the force of something bigger than any one individual that compelled people to assume a violence frame of reference and so things that under any other situation they would find repugnant. It was as though an individual hand pushed them along so that at various stages one could almost hear the actors say, “I had no choice but to...” As I have lived with the concept and watched it in action I have seen it happening to me in some personal conflict situations; ... (Redekop 2002a,255).

The push toward creating a dynamic theory emerged from engaging in an extended study on the topic of violence. The significance of Mimetic Structures of Blessing is that it enables discovery into new paths out of intense ongoing conflicts (ibid., 256).

For Redekop, reconciliation is the catalysts that help move individuals from conflict to blessing (ibid.). In relational systems shaped by Mimetic Structures of Violence, individuals, groups or systems are “closed, confining, acquisitive, [with] ever fewer options, [and] death oriented” (ibid.). The opposite is the case in Mimetic Structures of Blessing which are “open creative, generating ever more option, generous, life oriented” (ibid.).

The word blessing “*berakah*” of Hebrew origin stands in direct contrast to the words violence or curse. However, “blessings are empowering, [that can often] lead to creative and ever-expanding options, and are oriented toward life. Blessings are associated with gift, hence with grace and also love” (ibid., 257). Redekop also expounded on Rebecca Adams conception of mimetic desire as Love in the sense that it is life-opening. Furthermore, the self in the context of blessing is a “fully functioning, fulfilled Subject, that is, a person with the dignity and inner resources to act directly in the world” (ibid., 259).

The driving forces behind Mimetic Structures of Blessing are trust, love and joy. They work in tandem on a powerful level that their impact can be felt, perceived “at a tacit level and pass them on in the same way” or “spelled out, talked about, and even debated” (ibid., 277).

The first characteristic, can be considered as a readiness or being ‘open’ to create an environment wherein a newness rushes in. This interaction is shaped by meeting new people, experiencing new paradigms and finding new ways to do things (276). The second structure of blessing is ‘life-orientation’ that is central to honoring and respecting the moving spirit of life in people and beings (ibid). The third element is the ‘creativity’ that requires openness, space, generosity and thankfulness (277). It is because Mimetic Structures of Blessing take shape within relational systems that the skill of enframing can be used to initiate transformation from violence to blessing (278).

When structures of violence are impermeable, an additional element is need, ‘mimetic structures of transcendence’ to creatively operate outside the conflicting boundaries. Redekop defines this structure of transcendence as a literal “opening one’s self to the Other” (282) it is action oriented on embracing. Closely tied to the above process of structures of blessing is the

work of reconciliation. Reconciliation sets the trajectory of Mimetic Structure of Blessing in motion.

3.2.2 Reconciliation—Catalyst for Mimetic Structures of Blessing

For Redekop, the word reconciliation is solidly anchored from conception to “*re* (again), *com* (together), and *calare* (call) meaning call together again or make friendly again” (285) to build up something that was or is broken to a place of togetherness. Reconciliation is thus a phenomenon than is experience from inside an individual and outside him/her by others. In fact, “as one is reconciled within one’s Self, it contributes to reconciliation with one’s Other, and as reconciliation begins with one’s Other it helps one be reconciled within” (287).

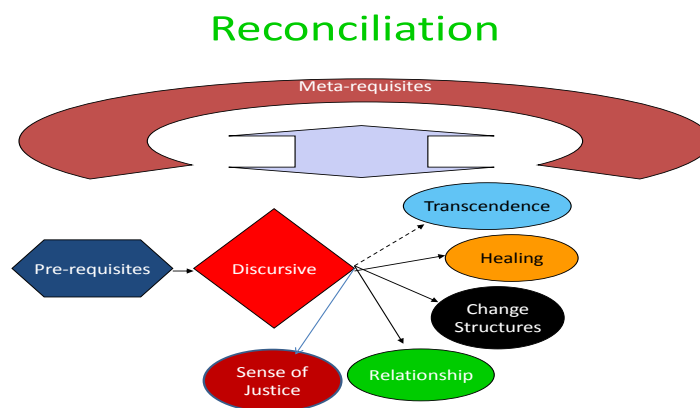
As a transformative process reconciliation has key elements that are “akin to reproduction, to the creation of a new life.” That is, that one engages these tenants: 1) “deal with the pain”; 2) “create a safe space”; 3) “break the trance”; 4) “introduce or recall teachings”; 5) “embark on Gradual Reciprocated Initiatives in tension-Reduction (GRIT)”; 6) “truth-telling”; “signalling remorse and forgiveness”; 7) “identify transformation”; 8) “creating rituals”; 9) “healing”; 10) “reframing”; 11) “structural change”; 12) “celebration” (292).

Reconciliation is not programmable. It is in some cases profoundly a mystery as it can change situations in ways never previously imagined. The mystery of reconciliation engenders dynamism and can create a surprise of the spirit (Redekop, 2002a). To get anywhere near this new context what is required is an involvement of the brain, heart, and body into an honest dialogical with Self and Other, even though it might “not [be] fully trusting it should be open to trust” (ibid., 303). This research purports that in these processes, it is possible to see, imagine, and work toward a new way of thinking, acting and being relationally outside of conflict. This

then places reconciliation on a continuum of readiness. To change any aspect of the ‘Self’ or relationships with the ‘Other’ requires an internal modus operandi of readiness.

Although this study focuses more on the conceptualization of reconciliation as was outlined in his first book (2002a), it is valuable to note that Redekop has expanded his presentation of the concept from an individual approach to a more group model. However, he still considered reconciliation to be both on a goal and process continuum. In so doing, the thirteen “result areas” of reconciliation listed above are encompassed into a condensed version (Redekop, 2012).

Redekop still maintains that “reconciliation is a transformation of violent, deep-rooted conflict marked by resentments, hatred, and a passion for revenge into mutually respectful relationships in which Self and Other have a new identity defined not by violence but by creative blessing”(2012, 594). Below, is his most recent “diagram of reconciliation – Figure 36.4” which illustrates his reformulation of the concept. Herein, some of the result areas of reconciliation are reconfigured into the meta- requisites, pre-requisites and discursive categories. The result areas are now transcendence, healing, change structures, relationship and sense of justice, which are measureable as fruits of reconciliation (ibid., 595). Diagram 3.2.2 Reconciliation;



3.3 Reflections: Immersion& Incubation

How can academic maturity lend itself to spiritual maturity?

Thinking about Redekop's point that relational systems are mimetic in nature, I began to examine how this nature evolves into mimetic desire. It has taken me entering into the MA in conflict studies program (in fall 2007) to begin strategically dismantle and synthesise my life story. Having the opportunity to attend school (while married and becoming a parent) and discovering various analytical tools to comprehend the mental, emotional, physical, spiritual and social constructs that have reshaped my life was a blessing.

In retrospect, it was in each MA course that I saw myself and circumstances in a different light, a theoretical light. I saw glimpses of myself in the discourse and context taught in classes about trauma, healing and reconciliation, conflict resolution analysis and design, religious identities and conflict, research methods, approaches to conflict and social justice, conflict and humanitarianism, history of conflict resolution, genocide and conflict resolution, spirituality and emergent creativity, and identity-based conflict. Most importantly, they inspired me to want to live out the promise I made to The Creator, to help others make it through their conflicts. But there was trepidation deep in my heart. I struggled with doubt that I could not do both (an MA and help others).

However, the wisdom, knowledge and understanding formal schooling has helped to shape in me has developed simultaneously within a relational system of knowing (western theoretical thought, experiential and spiritual thought). I have come to appreciate that what I know is in part (partial) as a result of my experiences and tacit learning from others as well as from formal teachings acquired in academia. To know this and accept this is liberating.

My learning experience is not one dimensional; it is three fold, with multiple more possibilities yet to discover. It is as Redekop states, "wisdom puts insight into perspective." Hence, what I personally know about abuse and recovery, family break down and build up, spiritual search for meaning, finding my place in the world, and ways of coping (adaptive and maladaptive), I know well because I have lived and learnt lessons from and am still growing through them.

As it stands, my life experiences coupled with a deep sense that I am 'called' and sustained by a higher power to relate to and encourage others through difficult life circumstances is how I now choose to understand/see myself. Whether in the role of a peacemaker, or conflict resolution practitioner (using theoretical tools), whatever relational system life brings me into I now know of the powerful new vision that can guide these interactions.

I am working on becoming academically mature (by completing an MA in Conflict Studies). I am imitating Prof. Redekop (my mimetic model), through his work on Mimetic Structures of Blessing. In so doing, I assumed the role of a researcher and entered into a relational system with my research participants. In our interaction, trust developed and my mimetic desire (to help others get through their conflicts) was placed into action. By engaging in the research, in a way, I have become a mimetic model desiring the well-being of others. My academic help seeking efforts, time, unexpected places and circumstances converged with others who are also help-seeking to a meeting point. At this point we are getting to know about each other. The research project has been a useful vehicle to establish this 'getting to know' phase. This is important in establishing trust. What I believe trust to be is the reciprocal feeling and internal comfort that it is safe to reach out and be vulnerable with the other. This in turn impact ones desire to 'go

deeper' and share the personal secrets that are challenging one's peace. If trust is not established, one is less likely to speak the truth with or listen to what you have to say (regardless how good it is.) The goal is then once we know about each other, the tools learnt from academia, life lessons and spiritual learning can enhance both (researcher participant's and researcher) lives. Keeping in contact to encourage one another is one way to ensure that trust-entrusted is regarded and preserved.

Polanyi (1964) in Redekop (2002a) stated that "knowledge is personal and people who wish to rigorously study something to understand it better are driven by intellectual passions." I would go one step further and suggest that such a person is deeply driven also by a spiritual impetus which is ultimately instructing the intellectual. In fact, I have experienced and continue to do so with the presence of something greater sustaining me throughout this MA process. Thus, Redekop's words are true to life, that "anyone who wants to do the work necessary to understand a deep-rooted conflict must be highly motivated. [And that] this motivation can derive from their own victimization, their passion for peacemaking, or a personal connection to similar conflicts" (179).

3.4 Summary of Part A

Grounded Theory (GT) is a pragmatic methodological approach that complements this qualitative research. It affords the best opportunity to capture the ‘real’, the ‘organic’ experiences of life from which people derived meaning. In this case, it best suits the research goal to capture the emergent meaning in the trajectory of some women who have experienced and survived DV.

Heuristic methodology enables the experience of the researcher to be acknowledged and present alongside the experiences of the research participants. It essentially, captures the nature of internal meaning that is unfolding in the researcher’s interior world while doing GT or organic⁴⁵ (allowing the research data to shape the) research. Heuristic methodology is used as it complements both the researcher and research participant’s disposition.

Structures of Blessing, is an example of ‘a good theory’, because it complements well both the GT and Heuristic approaches. Also, it enabled the conceptual framework and vocabulary to emerge from the research itself. Additionally, what it reveals enable understanding of both the research participant’s and researcher’s life experiences. It purports that in relational systems are mimetic flows (positive & negative) which can spring thought and action into mimetic desire. These desires can enable both positive and negative outcomes. Only the positive manifestations can create lasting channels toward reconciliation and peace.

The above three approaches work well together in an open blended sense to elucidate a particular understanding (the utility of spirituality or spiritual teachings drawn from as a resource) about the way in which some individuals in conflict have or can approach reconciliation.

3.5 Part B—Practical Research Methodology

According to Redekop (2002a), “methodology, is literally, the conscious reflection on the “way in which we proceed” (175). Strauss and Corbin contend that research is a ‘messy affair’, “rarely does it proceed completely as planned” (1998, 32). Some authors have argued that the research method and data are interconnected⁴⁶. That being said, the sequence of plans made concerning the research process is discussed in the subsequent sections.

The fieldworker (researcher) must endeavor to present the outcome of the research to reflect as close as possible the reality as experienced by the host (Goulet 1998).⁴⁷ With this in mind, a qualitative approach to research was chosen because it affords the researcher a direct opportunity to learn from select First Nations women’s multiple realities, to understand how they construct intra-personal reconciliation. Also employing an interpretive lens enhances an empathetic understanding of their plight, as the researcher seeks to find answers to her questions inherent in the participant’s experiences.

The findings that qualitative research generally provides can support explanations that purport to meet undisputed needs human experiences identify. Also, qualitative methods purport a more holistic emphasis as it focuses on the participant’s inner capacity. This research questions explores whether during conflicts capacities are developed by adherence to some aspect of spirituality or religious beliefs, but are not entirely limited to them. Although the reasoning process is generally inductive, the emergent observations of the research could reveal the underlining questioning to be irrelevant. Particularly if the participant’s stories reveal that no element of spirituality or religious belief factors into how they cope with DV. Or that exposure to spirituality or religious beliefs had a negative impact in her life.

Mason (2004, 56) in Knott (2007) asserts there are five divergent approaches to qualitative research. To varying degrees, these methods are characteristic of qualitative research; ethnographic, biographical/life, conversation/discourse analysis, interpretivist, psychoanalytic, and history/humanist (44). Not all five approaches were employed but at least two (conversation/discourse analysis, interpretivist) were engaged throughout the research. Overall, using a qualitative approach provides a unique understanding of a very complex mixture of variables (religion/spirituality, identity, gender and violence) that are inter-related in the context of Aboriginal women and DV/IPV.

As well, within, First Nations community, they too have adopted or are approaching a holistic framework for addressing issues of concern in their community. The integration of indigenous methodologies (i.e. the Medicine Wheel) in academic research illustrates a space is created in western academic institutions to account for difference. This difference is recognizable as an increase in Aboriginal scholarly presence.⁴⁸ Aboriginal writing about their culture, people, language and politics is a powerful step in the right direction to enabling their true voice to be heard. According to Kovack (2009) the inclusion of non-mainstream (marginalized) voices on discourse is an iterative process in the struggle to decolonize the methodological apparatus in western academy (31-32).⁴⁹

3.6 Research Design: ‘Laying the Foundation’

Feasibility Consultation-Academic

There were three professors approached in the Conflict Resolution Department at the University of Saint Paul, to provide guidance to the research. They were selected for their academic expertise concerning First Nations issues. From the ensuing discussions, it was suggested that the researcher communicate with community centers (in Ottawa and through-out Ontario) that address First Nations issues and get a sense of the relevance this research would have for them.

Taking into consideration the previous advice and researcher’s interest; the academic gaze was focused on rural, northern Ontario as opposed to urban (Ottawa). It is mainly because information about this region is not readily available, yet it possesses a wealth of information that can inform the rest of the province. Upon deciding to focus the research on a northern Ontario environment, a personal opportunity emerged where in the researcher’s family (husband, who specializes in First Nations health care) were able to travel to north-western Ontario during the summer of 2008 for work. This provided the first contact (informal) with the region.

About two weeks after arriving in Sioux Lookout, the researcher attended a meeting with her spouse to meet some of his colleagues. At the meeting the opportunity emerged for her to share with her spouse’s colleague Bob⁵⁰ (a First Nations official), her academic interest. The exchange revealed that he had contact with many of the stakeholders she would be interested in meeting. Bob indicated he appreciated the researcher’s desire to pursue a study of this nature. He committed to offer any assistance needed to connect with the regional stakeholders or agencies deemed important to the study. A few days following this meeting, the researcher

began outlining the organizations critical to access in the process of connecting with DV survivors and their experiences. Brainstorming for a few days and researching on the Internet revealed some of the agencies in the region; she called Bob and shared her wish list of Stakeholders. He also suggested ones that were overlooked. The unofficial visit to the region was positive as it became apparent it was feasible and relevant to both the academic and local community.

Probing for Non-Academic input

Exposure to the region and initial contact with a few First Nations representatives in the health care and social work field (during July-September 2008) indicated the study was relevant on multiple levels. At the time (summer 2008) there were six organizations (Nodin Counselling Services, Sioux Lookout Friendship Center, Equay-wuk Women's Group, First Step Women's Shelter, Sioux Lookout Meno-Ya-Win Centre's-Community Counselling & Addiction Services; Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Youth centre) identified as vital to the research and thus warranted contacting. The goals were to inform them of the research idea, acquire general input on the feasibility of the study, to seek their advice and to ascertain whether they would like to participate in the recruitment process. They all expressed favorable interest in the project and contacts were exchanged.

The most salient information these meetings generated (beyond putting faces to names) was that research needs to be culturally sensitive to the varied, yet connected nature of First Nations communities in the region. Another piece of advice given is to be mindful of communication styles and the types of settings that would mostly fit the study and the participants. Case in point, the researcher was advised that some Aboriginal women would not

divulge much information about abuse in a group setting. Typically, they would not want to implicate their family members in a negative light, particularly if the perpetrator of the abuse was a family member (husband, parent, or sibling) and a prominent member of the community. Furthermore, it was suggested that the times interviews were scheduled should not coincide with community or regional festivals (i.e. pow pow season) as this might challenge the response rate.

Upon careful reflection on the researcher's motivation and intellectual interest, it was decided that the region of focus would be Sioux Lookout zone. It proved to be an ideal mix of small, remote and rural town, which provides services to thirty reserve communities. Also, for reasons that seemed almost designed, there were multiple connections that developed with new people as a result of sharing the idea about the project. The support offered to actualize the project was unimagined. The time on a personal level also seemed ripe to proceed. The researcher became a new mother and was willing to do the legwork necessary for research while honing her homemaker skills.

Re-design

Equipped with pertinent community institutions feedback, upon returning to University of Saint Paul in fall 2008, the researcher began to refine the initial research proposal and began seeking out a supervisor and two thesis committee members. She first completed required methodological classes, prepared the proposal, shopped it around to potential academic advisors and chose the right advisor and committee members. This process took about a year and a semester to get through.

All committee members reviewed the proposal and gave feed-back on how to approach every aspect of the study. All the committee members provided guidance on the research

questions for the interviews. When the process was exhausted and all agreed they were suitable, the Ethics Board was approached for permission to begin the field work. Approval was not granted initially. However, after addressing their concerns, the approval was granted on December 14, 2009.

3.7 Research methods and procedures

Designing the Process

This study seeks to ascertain what constitutes certain First Nations women's experiences of domestic violence from a coping strategy perspective. The main research question posed is: "What role does your spirituality and or religious beliefs play into your coping strategy?" To unearth the unique and rich knowledge specific women possess was the goal and the impetus behind employing the qualitative one-on-one interviews in to the research. It is as Mason (2004) suggests, that "a legitimate or meaningful way to generate data is to talk interactively with people" (63-4). It was therefore believed that this is an effective way to gain understanding of the complex phenomenon of DV and how it intersects with spirituality, religion and coping.

Research setting—the town and main research site

The main research site was in the north-western Ontario town of Sioux Lookout. The population is approximately 5,500 with multicultural social dynamics. Through the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority and Nodin Counselling Service the researcher mainly recruited participants from various First Nations reserves and those that resided in town. The majority of guidance in terms of how to proceed with cultural sensitivity was solicited from Nodin as they are the First Nations leaders offering counselling exclusively to First Nations in town and on the reserves.

Nodin are considered the gatekeepers because they direct First Nations peoples to health resources in Sioux Lookout or if necessary, beyond. They have the capacity and resources to facilitate communication with participants both in Sioux Lookout and on reserves. Also, the majority of First Nations who use Nodin services speak English or have access to translators if one is needed. They provide the most opportunity to access participants from any of the thirty First Nations communities (reserves) and they are recognized as legitimate by those who use their services as a source of help.

Their regional office facility in Sioux Lookout was one of the primary recruiting sites. Of all the participating community agencies, the Director of Nodin Counselling Service was most instrumental in how research questions were formulated to incorporate cultural sensitivity and how to address the role of ‘community’. As well, it is because Nodin exclusively addresses First Nations issues in the region and experiences the highest volume of First Nation clients that working closely with them seemed logical.

Participants

Mason notes that researchers in social sciences will sample people as the research unit because “people are distinguishable, discrete and whole units or in other words, we know what they are and we can tell them apart” (1996, 86). The researcher has chosen to study about individuals as her unit of analysis because she is interested in understanding how some Aboriginal women who identify themselves within a spiritual or religious framework deal with violence. In essence, the researcher sees the participants’ as stories as “data [knowledge] to be accounted for [in academia and the wider community]”⁵¹ in the larger debate of how spiritual or religious resources factoring into coping. Furthermore, because the research focus is on a

marginalized population, regarding a sensitive topic the research employed varied forms of non-random sampling.

During the research proposal phase the goal was to use ‘convenience’ and ‘quota’ sampling to select eight Aboriginal women to interview about their lives. Eight was a number that was deemed potentially good in providing a small mixture of women over the age of eighteen.

In the recruitment phase, convenience sampling was foundational in the selection process. However, ‘purposive’ (judgemental) sampling as espoused by Johnson & Christensen (2004) became most instructive as it was flexible and enabled the researcher to be very specific in seeking out women in a particular stage of their healing journey. Also, because the subject matter of the research is very sensitive and the population is identified in research as a vulnerable population, purposive sampling fit best the research goals.

‘Purposeful’ sampling was used in the sense that the female participants had to be of First Nations origin, residing in Sioux Lookout or hail from the surrounding reserve communities and be eighteen years of age or older. As well, they had to have experienced DV before 2008 and be on a healing journey (seeking counselling, engaging in cultural re-education or participating in activities to promote personal healing).

Patton & Gall 1990; Borg, & Gall 1996, identified purposeful sampling as a useful process, because “the intent is to find a population that is ‘information rich’ and [that] suites the purpose of the study” cited in Molina 1999, 59. Moreover, the goal is “...to achieve an in-depth understanding of selected individuals, not to select a sample that will represent accurately a defined population” (ibid.).

The research initially desired to dialogue with eight (8) Aboriginal women, who resided in Sioux Lookout, Ontario or hail from any of the thirty (30) surrounding reserve communities. Following the recruitment process, six women responded to the invitation to participate and four women self-selected and completed the two rounds of interviews. Thus the research focused on four adult (over the age of eighteen) Aboriginal women. In terms of identity, their nationality (being an Aboriginal) gender (female), geographical location (residing in northwestern Ontario, Sioux Lookout or surrounding reserve community) and previous experience with DV prior to 2008 were factored into the criterion for their inclusion in the research. Their income, education levels, marital status, or sexual orientation, was not relevant to the study's scope or aim. However, when such information was provided it served as useful background information about the participants. This added more external dimensions to the participant's life story and experience with DV.

The history of the area reveals that there is a large population of First Nations that can be logistically accessed through Nodin. There are approximately 14,000 plus First Nations peoples living in the remote communities within the Sioux Lookout Zone. Also, of the 5,000 plus residents residing in the town of Sioux Lookout, at least half are of First Nations background. They mainly belong to two culturally and linguistically related groups: the Cree and Ojibwa people. "Their languages are of the Algonkian family of Amerindian languages. Different dialects exist within this group, ranging from Cree in the north to Ojibwa in northwestern area. "Anishimabek" is how members of these groups formally refer to themselves, literally translated into 'the People' " (singular from Anishinami).⁵²

Recruitment and Dissemination

Following receipt of the Research Ethic Board (REB) thesis approval on December 14th, 2009, a two months recruitment campaign was established to engage Aboriginal women's participation. The goal and approach of advertising was to garner help from various community agencies in Sioux Lookout and surrounding areas. These organizations included, Nodin Counselling Services, Sioux Lookout Friendship Center, Equay-wuk Women's Group, First Step Women's Shelter, Sioux Lookout Public Library, Wawatay Native Communication (interviewed on air twice at the local radio station), local supermarket which serviced all Sioux Lookout and the thirty reserves (poster on community bulletin board) and two Nursing Stations on reserves.

At participating facilities, it was requested to use their community bulletin board and available reception area to display the posters, flyers, the information packages (in an easily accessible, professional clear display case) and contact cards for interested participants. Additionally, there were sealed envelopes containing all information about the study. In each envelope was a recruitment letter (a one page synopsis of the study), research consent letter/form, research letter of appreciation, general themes to be discussed in the interview, an empty return address envelope and the researcher's contacts.

Approximately 500 copies of flyers were printed. About 110 copies of the research packages were also printed and disseminated between all the agencies except for the radio station and the supermarket. The radio station was sent electronic copies of the entire research recruitment documentation. The local supermarket was best suitable for posters, flyers and calling cards.

Once the researcher was contacted by a potential volunteer, through her preferred method of communication (phone, e-mail, regular post) it was established whether the individual and the research were compatible. This was determined by going over the respondents answers to the questions in the research recruitment letter. If the interested volunteer fit the research sample aims (First Nations, female, over eighteen, experienced DV before 2008, not reside in Wapekeka), she was included in the process. Following that, they were also asked to pass the word along about the research project to other women.

Furthermore, directors, and counselors (male and female) of the participating institutions were asked to spread the word to staff or former clients who would find it meaningful to use this research as an opportunity to share her voice. General staff at these organizations were also approached by the researcher to pass the word along in the community.

Following the advice given by the thesis supervisor, the researcher sought out sources from within the community (Sioux Lookout) that would have a wide audience that regularly speaks to the First Nations community, particularly women. This materialized into communication with the local Aboriginal radio stations, Wawatay News, to spread the word in the community using their website, radio and newsprint.

After speaking with four different radio hosts about the research, on February 16th, an Aboriginal female radio host, Kenina Kakaekayash, host of “Us Woman” responded to the request for an on air interview about the research project. At the time, her program aired Monday at 6:00 p.m., weekly and was broadcast over the airwaves of the thirty reserve communities and in town. On March 8th, 2010, the interview went live between the radio host and the researcher (the researcher called in from her home in Ottawa into the radio station in

Sioux Lookout). The interview lasted one hour, and was translated into Oji-Cree by the radio host. Two weeks later, it was re-aired on March 22nd, at the same time.

There were no participants in the research that identified they heard about the research from the radio program. However, a friendship kindled between the researcher and the radio show host. We have kept in contact (e-mail and by phone) since then. The radio host has offered to bring the researcher back onto the show when the research is completed to discuss findings.

A second radio program interview was undertaken regarding the research project. This was in Ottawa on June 30th, 2010. Dr. Qais Ghanem's radio show "dialogue with diversity" which broadcasts on Chin Radio Station, was conducted with the researcher and another colleague. Both interviews (this researcher and colleague) focused on First Nations women and violence within a Canadian context. This particular interview was not aimed at recruiting participants for the study. Its focus was to inform and engage with the general public on the subject matter in the context the researcher has used (Aboriginal women and violence—how their spirituality and or religious beliefs factor into their coping strategies). As well as discuss the preliminary findings in the media.

In the end, the final four participants who emerged from the selection process were from four varied First Nations communities (reserves). There was no financial compensation offered to participate in the study. Instead, the participants received a letter of appreciation. The participants were either a woman seeking counselling in Sioux Lookout, a woman who had previously underwent counselling in Sioux Lookout from the respective agencies that offered this service or a woman who left her community due to DV and is currently rebuilding her life in Sioux Lookout.

Interviews

Rubin & Rubin (1995) cited in Taylor (2010) indicate that a “qualitative interview creates the opportunity to give voice to groups who have been silenced or marginalized while allowing for the importance of context and individual experience” (46). Herein, the interview process elucidated subtleties of the complex interconnection between DV or IPV, and how spirituality and religious beliefs impacted on coping strategies.

The interviews were facilitated by the researcher. The interviews were one-on one in nature. The participants were asked and agreed verbally and in writing to participate in one primary one-on-one and one secondary follow-up interview. The primary interview was a semi structured interview that ranged in length from one to a maximum of one and half hours in length. The primary interviews all took place from February 17th – 19th, 2010.

Participants were presented with a list of sixteen pseudonyms to choose from to refer to themselves and community. The names were fictive to offer anonymity. They chose the ones they liked.

Follow-up semi-structured interviews with the participants were initially arranged for one month following the first interview in 2010. These were also semi structured and ranged in length from thirty minutes to one and half hours. The purpose of this interview was to provide both participants and researcher the opportunity to reflect and discuss the process of change they were encountering since the first interview. This was also an attempt to garner how the participant’s were engaging with counselling advice they received, sorting out lessons learnt and how she saw herself in relation to her family and community.

The participants and the researcher had planned to communicate via Tele Health conferencing. This was to occur with the assistance of Nodin counseling services. The initial preferred medium of communication, was Tele-health conferencing, as it best offered a feasible cost and time effective measure. This was deemed important from the research design phase to always seek out minimal physical disruption, minimize financial cost to either participants or the researcher as well as be independent of inclement weather. The plan was based on the assumption that the daily routines of the participants and researcher would thus be minimally impacted. However, this did not occur as planned.

The follow-up phase of the research is important as to ascertain the extent to which intra psychic (self) reconciliation had been pursued, impeded and or was underway. They were expected to take place one month following the first interviews. However, this did not occur. Instead, the follow up interviews materialized, six, seven, and eight months respectively, following the first interview (Aug. 27th, August 31st, Sept 1st, and Oct. 4th 2010).

Open-ended and semi structured questions were employed in the discussions to detail the respondents' socio-cultural and spiritual experiences. This provided some understanding of how social systems operate and how the women relate, interpret and behave within them.

Mason indicated that "interviews are one of the most commonly recognized forms of qualitative research method" (1996, 39). Additionally, she echoed that semi-structured interviews are a useful approach to employ in qualitative research because they illustrate better the interviewee's entire perspective. The objective behind the interview process is to specifically seek the respondent's views in relation to the topics (domestic violence, spirituality and religious based coping strategies).

The interviews took place in a relaxed, quiet and confidential atmosphere/room where the respondent and researcher were comfortable to communicate honestly and sincerely. Nodin Child and Family Services provided this meeting space for three of the interviews. The second meeting space was at the home of the researcher. One research participant requested a different, more personal interview location and chose to meet wherever the researcher suggested. The researcher suggested her home and the participant agreed. At the interview sites, the room was prepared in advance with beverages of choice (teas, water, juices that the participants indicated to the researcher they enjoyed).

The first interviews were semi-structured. This is the format mainly used in qualitative analysis, wherein the focus is on the participant and her experiences in relation to the specific themes of the research (religious beliefs, spirituality, domestic violence and coping strategies); coupled with this, are potential guiding questions that feed off the participant's responses. Following each interview, brief notes were made on the overall impression of the process. In these notes the researcher's personal thoughts and reflections on what transpired were captured.

If during the interviews the interviewee illustrated discomfort and requested the conclusion of the interview, the Nodin counselor assigned to assist the researcher would be notified to address any emotional distress and the interview would have been terminated. Then, an additional participant would be recruited to engage in the process. However, no participant withdrew from the face to face interview for this reason.

Research Time frame

Initially, the research was projected to be completed over a period of two months (December 2009–January, 2010). While this did not occur, what became evident was that

establishing the lines of communications between the participating institutions representatives, the researcher, as well as the participants required far more involved effort to maintain transparency and communication than expected. Thus, the research process took longer than anticipated (from two months to eight months from interview one through to interview two).

The process of establishing and maintaining contact with the research participants proved to be far more involved and problematic than originally perceived. The first interviews with the participants took place in February 2010 and the second interviews were intended to be completed one month or so later; however, this was not the case. Interview B (II) took place six to eight (end of August to October) months later, following a long and involved pursuit.

At the inception of the research design, interview B (II) was supposed to occur via Tele Health via Nodin. Nodin made the necessary provisions for the researcher to make use of their facilities. However, all four participants were not easily available for follow up through this measure of communication for varied reasons.

In order for Tele Health to have worked, the participants would have had to be settled in one place or provided contact information where-by they could be reached even if they were to occupy a different location. The original thought process behind the use of Tele Health as a viable communication option was that it would minimize cost and disruption to daily family, community routines for participants and researcher and to work within an established mode of communication being used with this population.

Mainly, it was because Tele Health was already being used by professionals regionally to communicate with Aboriginals in remote communities without unnecessarily disturbing their daily pattern of life was why it was considered a viable option. Also, Tele health technology

would have been available to all participants if they were to return back to their community following counselling in Sioux Lookout. This was to also enable the researcher and research participants to stay connected and be on the researcher's original schedule for completion of field work.

Participants' life events and time

In the academic environment, researchers are encouraged to frame their research from conception to completion within a reasonable timeframe. However, this study revealed that not all qualitative research will occur on time and as planned. Case in point, one of the participants changed jobs, which meant that the information given to the researcher was no longer useful in keeping the lines of communication open. When she began the process of pursuing gainful employment elsewhere, or moving between a few different communities, it became difficult to follow.

Another participant had to travel out of community extensively with her family (children) to seek and address health care issues. This meant that staying connected was almost impossible. Information was only gathered through the grapevine (from relatives) as to possible places she would be. For another participant, relapsed into a state of active conflict seemed to have derailed her initially intended process toward self-reconciliation discussed in her first interview. None of her contacts enabled us to maintain connection until interview B (II). The fourth participant's work and personal travel also created a break in the lines of communication.

Nothing anticipated in the research interview designed to establish the study within a particular time frame was evident once interviews took place. Once the women opened their

lives to the research process , every time frame change and moved according to the space and time they occupied.

The researcher then began to pursue (calling old numbers), finding clues left following the women's departure from one place to another, connecting with co-workers, family members, and physically pounding the pavement in Sioux Lookout, inquiring from familiar faces at places one might have passed through as to the whereabouts of all four participant's.

Resources used

Financial resources were needed for three flights (round trip) arrangements to the region, as well as the cost of living (accommodation, food, travel while there). A child care provider was necessary (the researcher had a four month old baby to care for) while pursuing fieldwork. A baby sister was brought up from Ottawa to Sioux Look out to work for the researcher while she conducted the interviews. This also proved helpful to one of the participants. She had agreed to participate in the study after arranging a sitter for her child. However, her plans fell through on the morning of the interview and she was certain she would have to cancel the interview. The researcher offered to share her babysitter with the participant and she accepted. This enabled the interview to take place. Also, a ride from the interview location was offered to the research participant to lessen the cost of transportation back to her transition home. Lunch was also provided for this participant and her child.

Initially, three transcribers were approached to transcribe the field work data. However, no one was able to transfer the files (without corrupting the data), so the researcher decided to undertake the work personally. The audio materials were gathered, and recorded (cellphone, microphone, and hand-held tape recorder) by the researcher during the interviews.

There was significant cost associated with purchasing miscellaneous items such as materials that assisted the information collection process (CDs, memory stick, note pads, pens, envelopes, envelope encasement, stamps, photocopies, poster printing, etc.) all of which was absorbed by the researcher.

Ethics

On the ethics of research in his work with American Indian communities, Murray Wax indicated that researchers should involve representatives from the Aboriginal populations in the design of the research. This would prove invaluable because "...conjoint planning would encourage researchers to think more deeply about the benefits and potential harms, as viewed by the tribal members" (1991, 451). Doing this can reduce the participant's perception, that they are "the exploited victims of careerist scientists, [and instead] they might come to define themselves as co-participants with correlative status, responsibilities and privileges" (ibid., 452).

In many research projects in spite of the concerted effort to cover all bases, there are usually unforeseen areas in the design stage. Particularly, when researching about vulnerable populations. There were two measures this research drew on to minimize the risk to the participants. From the outset, advice was sought from Aboriginal institutions in Sioux Lookout, who work specifically with this population. Their advice and active involvement in the research design regarding matters relating to interview questions, how to actualize cultural sensitivity and assessing potential risk was most instructive.

As a result, many of the Aboriginal executives in the Sioux Lookout region responsible for addressing Aboriginal women's issues were spoken to during the feasibility study (in 2008-2011). They centrally informed the research. They were the only ones that extended their time,

resources, and expertise fully to actualize the project. The communications were between the Director of the Aboriginal Health Authority, the Director of Nodin services and other First Nations professionals working within these organizations. Many of our communications were carried out in their office, via e-mail and on the phone over the life of the study. They also informed and championed the research among other staff and through internal communication network.

To minimize harm to the participants, the researcher made the request from the participating institution for a counsellor, should one be needed. The institution honoured this request. A counsellor was assigned throughout the life of the interviews to assist anyone of the participants, should she or the researcher sense/indicates re-traumatization occurred in sharing her story.

The second measure employed to minimize unforeseen risk to the population sample was to creatively ‘walk a mile in her shoes’, becoming knowledgeable about the day to day life of some of the women.⁵³ The researcher drew empathy from her experiences as a woman, mother, wife, student, and visible minority and to some extent develop a deeper understanding of the participants. She also went a step further and travelled to communities, venturing into the lived experiences of some Aboriginal women living in communities surrounding Sioux Lookout during the life of the research. In these travels and interactions, there was no direct connection with the research project. However, the researcher’s underlining goal in doing this was to become more involved in Aboriginal women’s life as the opportunity and invitation presented itself.

Aboriginal female associates and friends created the context for the researcher to participate with them in various community festivals, trips, and informal gatherings in their homes and this further created the opening that textured her understanding of the 'real' life. In these gatherings, Aboriginal women often shared their life stories (without prompting) and recounted how they overcame abuse from childhood into adult life. Usually, the catalyst that initiated this process was a gathering of women to part take of a meal. In many of these instances, the researcher actively listened as they shared.

This was instrumental because it enabled cultural awareness for the researcher. What usually set the mode, tone and context for the women to feel free to talk about sensitive issues was laughter and self-awareness. It provided a starting point to dialogue. The women would begin talking about something ironic about them that they were not aware of until after experiencing abuse. Once one person took the lead, the other women seamlessly spoke without verbal cues and discussed her life story. In all these encounters (approximately 20 from 2009-2012) two levels of analysis were present, the individual and the community's response to the conflict of DV.

One important caveat on a controlled variable, incorporated into the selection process, was one question to garner the current community the prospective volunteer resided in or hailed from. This was to determine and thus exclude for ethical reasons, any woman from the community of Wapakeka (the reserve community where my spouse is employed). This measure was used to minimize response biases or participation skewing due to familiarity with the researcher's family member.

3.8 Limitations/Challenges

At the proposal designed phased, it was anticipated that there would be challenges derived from the natural- cold temperature, far distance, rural setting, physical environment that could adversely affect the research process. It is widely known in northern western Ontario that the winters are colder with more snow than southern Ontario. This means that airplanes get snowed in, flights get cancelled, and technologies fail due to power outages, more frequently. Should any of these occur during the time the interviews were scheduled, this could destabilize the research data gathering process, by cancelling interviews.

Or perhaps, establishing rapport might take longer than anticipated. In this case women might require more time to relate to the process or build comfort with researcher. Most of the interviews occurred as expected. No more than two interview sessions were required. However, during the second participants' interviews unusual technical difficulties emerged and all the taped information (from three sources) were lost. The computer recordings kept crashing after a few minutes of recording, the hand held tape recorder jammed and the phone voice memo feature was recording but produced no sound output. One interview was rerecorded at another time over the phone.

Although, attrition/dropout rate of respondents was an issue, their change in course was manageable. What emerged is that the respondents who were interested in sharing their stories had their own internal motivation for participating in the study and this enabled them to exhibit where possible their own sense of commitment to see the process through. Perhaps, if the individuals were not as committed, recruiting new participants would be an ongoing process. This would have further extended the initial research timeframe.

Although the populations of First Nations residing in Sioux Lookout typically speak English, some of the older generation only speak Oji-Cree. If some of the respondents were from this age group or linguistic background, this might have posed a challenge for the researcher to communicate directly with them. Although this is not entirely problematic because a translator could be employed, to do so would have added to the financial cost of the research and be an additional hurdle to overcome. However, if necessary, a translator would have been a useful addition in the data gathering phase, to ensure information, meaning and understanding in interviews was transmitted and received accurately.

There was one control variable for age: respondent's had to be over eighteen years old. The possibility that the population sample could have been heavily favored by one age group could have occurred. In the end, the smaller number of selected individuals reflected a mixture of various (young adult, adult, and mature adult—eighteen to fifty years old) age groups. In our informal interactions (not taped sessions) women alluded to their ages.

This project was not funded by any funding agencies. There were no constraints placed on the study to use the data to create generalizability. The study consisted of four Aboriginal women from a regional population size of approximately 14,000. The sample size was miniscule, only four (4 or .03 percent) of women. So the information garnered is not generalizable.

3.9 Summary of Findings

Providing a summary of narrative research findings is useful because it enables the opportunity for particular contexts to be revealed on a subject matter. In so doing, the researcher can honour promises made to the participants and or participating institutions about the final report. This could take the form of a formal seminar presentation or an informal group

discussion wherein at different times the participating institutions and participants can give feedback about their role, the research findings, and the general sense of participating in the overall process. Upon completion, a copy of the research will be given to each woman in their prefer form (electronic version or bound paper). Additionally, the researcher would make available a presentation of the findings to participating institutions.

3.10 Reflections-Immersion

The methodological procedures engaged in this session were exasperating to say the least. At times, it seemed that all my best efforts to organize everything (scheduled meetings, follow-up with the participants, search literatures, etc.), was diverted by something unforeseen (in my personal life or the participant's) and redirected the process.

This process of going into the fieldwork without a road map per se (i.e. not following a methodological orientation that is based on research that is not theory testing) at times made the process seem haphazard. However, everything worked out at an appointed time and in some ways that were completely independent of my influence. This often occurred, when I least expected it to.

This research process taught me about the virtue of patience on a new level. I often sensed that the research was no more about the academic endeavor (acquiring an MA) than about doing research that engenders and effects spiritual growth. Engaging in the research process enabled me to development a deeper ethical concern for others (particularly focused on individual(s) that are adversely affected by complex and perplexing traumas/conflicts) alongside the honing of my professional life skills.

In the moments I was ready to give up, the times when I ceased trying to find order in the process were the times that pieces of the puzzle began coming together. Whether it was during active pursuit (phoning, e-mail, going out to look in places I knew participant's had been before) to find participants or during my rest and distancing phase (immediately following the four interviews both at the First and Second intervals, transcribing data, after reading large amounts of literature), I was often surprised at what knowledge emerged.

There were many moments when I thought of giving up and this is the time that a break-through would appear and encourage me to continue thinking about, processing the information and relating to the participants as they came into my life. The most important lesson that emerged from doing the methodology from the ground up is that I learnt from the inside out. The valuable lessons learnt were: patience, endurance, respect and humility. These lessons were learnt while honing a healthy appreciation for the emergent and transcendent forces at work in research about real people's lives.

3.11 Summary of Part B

The underling goal of the study is to be a forum that provides a more geographical in-depth understanding of how selected Aboriginal women have experienced and survived violence. The *a posteriori* type of justification to give account of GT data, that qualitative interview approach served, extrapolated well the specific women's views in relation to the research topic. The underlining justification is that research can be a vehicle that creates opportunities to enable silenced or marginalized individuals to sound out their voice— even though some aspects are revealed through the researchers approach to methodological and theoretical lens of understanding.

This has the potential to provide insight on various factors (like remembering the spiritual component of individual's lives) that are interrelated in the process of moving from violence to peace. This research can give a useful perspective to policy and program initiatives to better situate how to meet some First Nations women's needs. Also, this process increases awareness of the strengths of qualitative research that draws on blended (open) methodological frameworks. The notion of charting meaning from marginalized peoples experiences takes on a particular form (real, relevant, organic) when specific theoretical teachings are employed, such as GT, Heuristic and Mimetic Structures of Blessing.

This cohort of Aboriginal women's voices has revealed that examining spirituality and religious based coping strategies can create insight when seeking to mitigate DV from the individual level of analysis. Employing an appropriate methodological approach is always a key element in research (qualitative or quantitative) as it not only forms how data is derived, but also informs how meaning is validated.

Chapter Four:

4.0 Telling Their Story

This section first introduces the participants in relation to the topic. Second, it provides an in depth outline (map) of how they engaged their spirituality or religious beliefs to unearth meaning from their experiences with DV. Furthermore, it identifies their readiness strategies to actualize self-reconciliation. The researcher also personally reflects on the process.

According to Redekop there are three levels of interpretations in conflicts that can elucidate understanding: collecting experience information as bytes (Level 1), developing a narrative (Level 2) and generating theoretical insights (Level 3). Presenting the women's story encapsulates levels one and two, otherwise known as "enframing and emplotting" (2002a, 183). Mapping the participant's experiences served as a snapshot that assisted the researcher in isolating the issues; it also elucidated some knowledge about the participants at a given time (during interviews I & II) as they reflected in retrospect on the DV that occurred before 2008.

A line-by-line coding of the interview transcripts revealed some of the areas to be analyzed—sixty one sub themes emerged. These were then grouped under seven overarching categories (universal categories deemed essential to the phenomenon being studied)—environment, obstacles, means, interests, opportunities, objectives and readiness. Identifying and grouping these categories made it easier to "clarify the general context and specific conditions in which a particular phenomenon [DV] [was] evident" (Charmaz 2006, 63).

The themes or categories outlined in the mapping diagrams are used because they can be considered intricately woven into the conflict. Manen refers to themes as "the process of insightful invention, discovery, [and] disclosure". It is thus giving "shape to the shapeless" (1990, 88). From Redekop's (2002a) perspective the creation of themes fits into the emplotting

phase. Herein structures are unlocked to reveal what is intelligible in the conflict. This also can isolate specific time frames things transpired in the conflict, beginning, middle, and perhaps end. The focus herein is on key events, actions and critical junctures to capture a narrative that best reflects their stories.

In diagrams 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, what is being conceptually depicting are the seven universal categories or themes and sixty one sub-themes at play throughout the stories. They are integrated into a creative Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA)⁵⁴ pattern to depict the web of influence or interaction that are generally at play in some conflicts and specifically the research participant's life. They are not an exhaustive list and they remain flexible to potential collaboration in other contexts to engender peace or conflict. Following the presentation of diagrams, the discussion turns to the women's stories. Based on the order of interviews the participants are; Avena from Noway, Tiawan from Yuway, Levene from Neway, and Rezara from Tuway (the participants and their community names are pseudonyms they chose from a list of suggests the researcher conjured).

4.1 Universal Categories & Themes in Mapping the Domestic Violence Conflict

Environment, Obstacles, Means, Interests, Objectives, Opportunities, Readiness and potential to be at odds or collaboration for peace and or conflict



4.1.2. Mapping the Universal Sub Themes in the Domestic Violence Conflict

Environment, Obstacles, Means, Interests & Objectives, Opportunities, and potential to be at odds or collaboration for peace and conflict

Environment

- Isolated reserve
- Closed
- Traditional/conventional
- Un-caring/cold
- Unsafe
- Unhelpful
- Lonely

Readiness-

- Recognizing the relationship is over
- Near death experience
- Desire to take control of situation & life
- At the stage to forgives self & other
- Desire/deserve something new
- Becoming responsible
- Perception of self changed-
- Acquire safe space/place
- Stand-alone
- Commit to change

Obstacles

- Community
- Community abuse
- Community member's perceptions
- Personal fears
- Non-Aboriginal perceptions of wellbeing
- Leaving the community
- Not having money
- Community agencies
- Substance abuse
- Lack of power

Opportunities

- Leaving home/community
- Getting divorced
- Staying at shelter
- Meeting new people
- Travelling to new places
- Learning about other cultures
- Learning new ways of coping
- Learning about and participating in rituals-
- Accepting help

Means

- Love
- Motherhood
- Womanhood
- Education
- Children
- Tradition
- Gainful employment
- Access to services
- Good advice

Interests-

- Be safe
- Healthy
- Live without fear or violence
- Become educated
- Make friends
- Grow spiritually
- Help others
- Listening to inner voice

Objectives

- Free of violence
- Acquire safe space/place
- Live the good life
- Be a good person
- Know the Creator
- Value self/self-care
- Finding good traditional teachers
- Learning cultural language
- Learning about Aboriginal culture

4.2 Interviewee I- Introducing Avena from Noway

Avena is an Aboriginal woman who resides in a remote community in north-western Ontario. This reserve community has no other access than by plane in the summer, fall and spring, and winter road in winter months. She was a house wife (married in 1999) and is a stay-at-home mom with four children. Her story depicts a mother's powerful, undying, self-sacrificing love for her children.

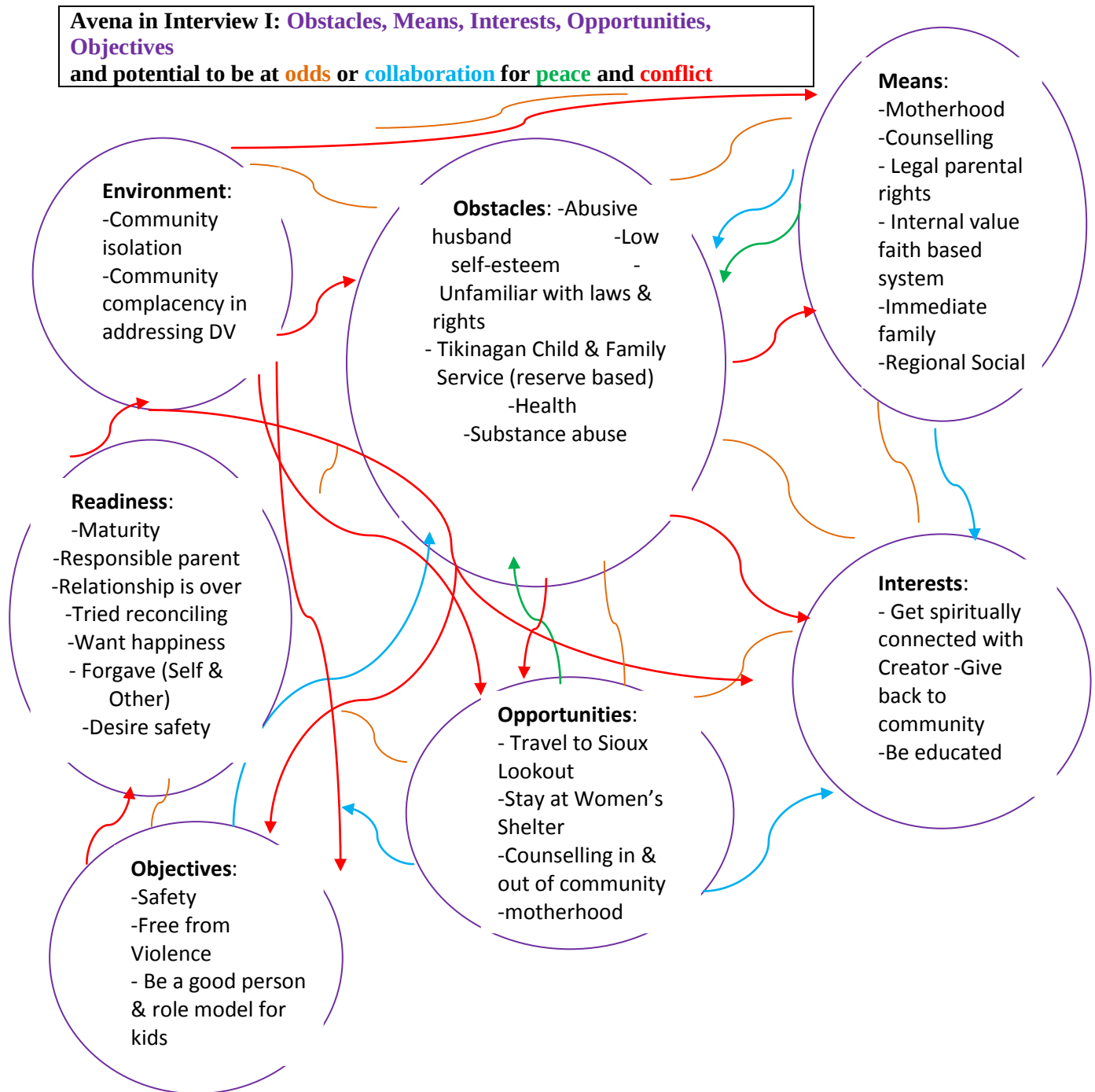
The DV conflict occurred while she lived on the reserve with her husband. The abuse was mainly verbal and was on-going throughout their relationship, (since 1992 they cohabitated until their 1999 marriage). She noted that the abuse was one element in a very complex relationship with her husband. However, by 2009, the abuse culminated in her thoughts of suicide. There were issues of trust, substance abuse, and violence through intimidation. She also indicated they both used violence in the relationship to address deeper issues.

The violence transcended their private life, spilling over into other domains, such as work and social spheres. In spite of the abuse she tried to preserve her marriage. She identifies her reason for staying: "I was married and I took my vows seriously. And that is another reason why I stuck with him," even to the point of contemplating death. In Avena's life, becoming a mother was a real turning point. When asked about where she found the strength to care for her children and appreciate this new role, she highlighted the following:

That strength, it has always been there. Cause I grew up with my grand ma, and she was a church person. While I was growing up with her, she told me a bit about the Bible. And then, I wanted to be a good person. Like in the Bible it says something like respect others, respect your mother, your parents. So, I wanted to be a good person.

Below, is a pictorial outline of her DV story which encapsulates how the emergent categories interacted.

4.2.1 Mapping Domestic Violence in Avena's story



Above, the seven categories (objectives, environment, obstacles, means, interest, opportunity and readiness) of analysis seek to elucidate some things in the complex web of factors that shaped Avena's experience with DV. The red lines represent the strong reach the category has in the life span of the conflict. All the blue and green lines (collaboration & peace) are outlining that the participant was already or became aware of the positive impact that these categories could have on her circumstances. This was why she pursued them. The orange lines suggest that there are always many unknown factors that have not been identified that are also implicated in the conflict.

Avena drew an enormous amount of strength to prepare herself for change from the powerful love she has for her children. In her opinion, "even leaving my husband, it was best for them too that I get out of my marriage. Because I couldn't even be the mother I wanted to be to them." Her love was a source of courage to rely on in deciding to leave the abusive relationship.

When she was ready, she embarked on the journey to Sioux lookout, where she had the opportunity to go to the Women's Shelter, have counseling, experience some First Nations spiritual heritage and events, lose weight and battle the system to gain custody of her four children.

After Avena received custody of her children, she experienced some additional difficulties. The child and protective service, Tikanagin (both in the community and in Sioux Lookout) were keeping a watchful eye on her care of the children. There were looming allegations of sexual abuse occurring with the eldest boy toward one of his sisters. She also indicated that she is sensitive to the issue of sexual abuse because she experienced something similar when she was younger.

Self-sacrifice continues to assume new meaning for Avena, as she diligently builds a safe, healthy home environment. This even takes precedence over any desire to entertain a new partner. After a year in Sioux Lookout, Avena was ready to take her children and traveled back to their community. On the day of our interview she was in transit to her goal of re-establishing herself in a new way of life on her Reserve. Most illustrative of this was the shirt she sported. It read in bold yellow words “I am worth it.” When asked what the words mean to her, she indicated the following:

It means that I can go through anything. As long as I have my kids, I can do it. Like right now, I am going home. I am ready to go home.

Yep. I have, I’ve got my own place, my own house lined up, I have my custody papers so he can’t take them away from me anytime he wants. He has visitation rights but it has to be supervised. And then, I have a restraining order. Cause I don’t want to live in fear. I am just about ready. The place that I left, I can do it.

Equipped with a new outlook on life, a new attitude and renewed belief about herself, Avena was ready to take the advice she received through counselling in Sioux Lookout and relocate back to her reserve. She was excited about the prospect of a life without violence or abuse and began envisioning herself helping others.

Follow-up Interview

On August 27th, 2010, six months later, Avena’s follow-up interview was conducted. It occurred over the phone (while she was still on the reserve), and the researcher was in Sioux Lookout. Although in the research proposal the plan was to have this follow-up interview over KO Tele health, logistically, it proved difficult to organize. This difficulty had little to do with the technology or the availability of it. This is elaborated on further in the reflections at the end of the chapter. She was asked four central questions to garner what her experience was like in returning to her community (these same questions were posed to the other participants as well).

Avena indicated that both she and the children were doing great. That she had been travelling with some of them and upon returning to the community had the inclination to fill the gap in her community to provide a safe place for women who are abused.

Her children continued to contribute to her happiness and she derived much strength from this. Her health was continually improving as she was losing weight due to diet and regular exercise. Teaching the children values is a central part of ensuring that they experience a different life from hers, the good life she desires. She speaks to this below:

My health is now my concern. I lost 40 pounds since I left my husband. Recently, I lost 10 more. Ever since I came back, I got a tread mill. I am aiming to lose some more. The kids also want to use it. We usually go for walks. But because it's so hot outside these days, we can't do it as often. So I bought a treadmill. I use the treadmill.

Avena indicated the following about the influence her counselling advice had on her and how it presently factors into her thought life and actions:

Counselling was very helpful. The counsellor helped me to see there was more to life than the violence I had experienced. There have been challenges, but I now realize that I am cared for. That someone out there cares about me. My counsellor was very good to me, I love her.

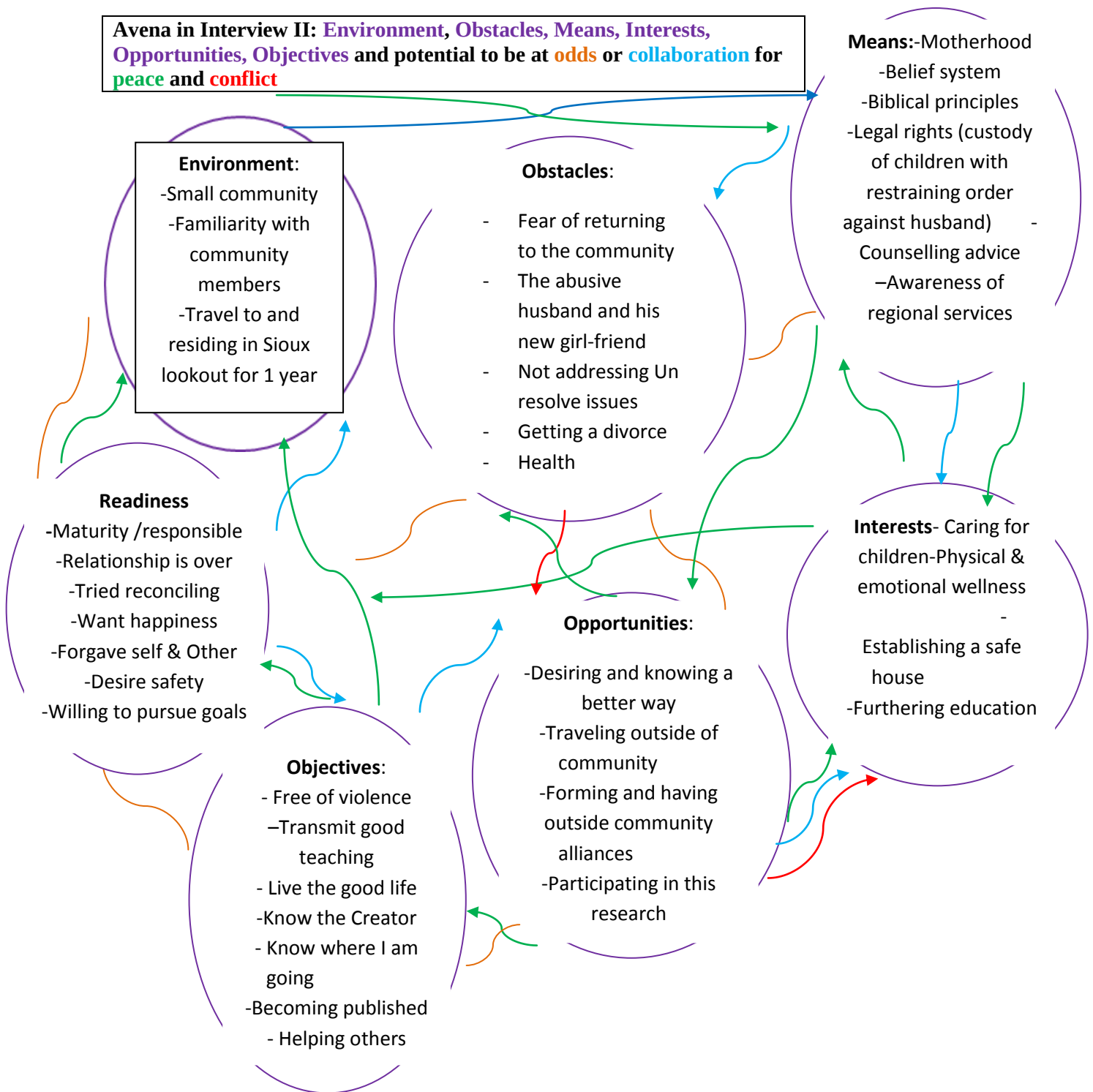
Furthermore, her belief in the Creator and her spirituality have increased as a result of under-going the many challenges and surviving them. Bible reading has also become a point of renewing her strength and an avenue to transmit Christian values to her children.

On my belief in the Creator, ever since I was a kid I wanted to get to know Him. And I always said when I have kids I want them to know the guy up stairs. I think that is happening. Whenever there is a camp meeting in the community, my son attends. And I am reading the Bible too. My eldest son is interested in it too.

Now, Avena's focus in life seems to be expanding as she seeks meaning and purpose beyond mothering.

4.2.2 Mapping intra personal reconciliation post domestic violence in Avena's Story

Avena in Interview II: Environment, Obstacles, Means, Interests, Opportunities, Objectives and potential to be at odds or collaboration for peace and conflict



Now, she believes she is ready to actualize a personal goal of returning to school and completing a degree in early childhood education. “I am thinking about going back to school. I am interested in studying early childhood education. I have not started it as yet, but I am going to pursue it.” For Avena, life has turned around from a place of great conflict and unhappiness to a place wherein she has strived to achieve a safe, peaceful house for her and the children.

In Avena’s case her deep love for her children and going back to a familiar route, the childhood biblical teachings that introduced her to God/Creator and coupled with the blessing of others caring and showing love makes all the difference in her predicament. What seems constitutive in her story is that valuing the Creator and engaging faith teachings can be a mitigating factor leading one into changes from a DV conflict into a violence free life. For her, the spirituality (nurtured by Christian teachings received in childhood) became a resilient resource from which she drew impetus to pursue a life of peace.

4.3 Interviewee II- Introducing Tiawan from Yuway

Tiawan is a First Nations female who was married for ten years. They lived on a reserve in north western Ontario and travelled to other communities and towns during that time to work and live. She attended a regional residential school as did her parents. Violence, physical abuse, alcohol and drug use were aspects of life she knew both within her immediate family and on the reserve. Particularly, in her growing up years, she witnessed her father and mother in many domestic violence situations.

While attending residential school, she was introduced to Christianity and faith-based teachings. They shaped her thinking about life in general and specifically her role in marriage. Her residential school experiences of Christian values and beliefs shaped her marriage world view. She stated, “I went to residential school and I was told that divorce is a sin, and adultery is a sin too. To be with a partner other than your spouse ... is not allowed...” The community she grew up in also operated within these same Christian values and ultimately contributed to her decision to stay in the DV the length of time she did. However, there came a point in her marriage experience that led her to desire and decide to move out of the context of DV:

There was this one incident when we lived out in the city. I was so isolated. I didn't have any friends, no one to talk to, just my sisters who would call from time to time. That is when the drinking and the drug started, and the DV was really there. There was this one incident where I felt I was losing, where I would lose my life; because my partner had come home from the bar, and he seemed different than normal. He had taken out ... took out a knife and he was talking like there were people after him. Or something like that. I couldn't get him to put the knife down. Then I was afraid for my life. I was thinking, this is my life and I don't want it to end this way. . .

[Furthermore,] my partner was having an affair with my first cousin.

In 2008, she moved to Sioux Lookout to embark on a new path. In 2010, she saw a poster advertising the project at a First Nations community center and decided to participate. At the time of the first interview, she had recently made a career change and was working in a lifestyle center.

Her conversation reveals her spirituality was negatively affected by her residential school experiences. It in turn shaped her actions and reactions in marriage. Driven both by a self- directing and deferring religious coping, she soon realized the Christian rituals she held proved ineffective, "...I use to pray a lot, to get me through all that. After a while I started to pray that I didn't want this anymore; even if it means going our separate ways. I didn't want this anymore. I wanted to make those changes...". Her approach then became mainly self-directing as she focused on unearthing meaning from the experiences.

In the, diagram 4.3.1, the red lines denote the direction the categories are interacting within the conflict. Orange lines depict the researcher's estimation of the many unknown factors that appear throughout the life of the conflict; however, they were not identified at the time of interview by the participant (either as a result of the right questions was not being asked or they were not remembered or deemed irrelevant by the participant). All the blue lines indicate that the interviewee was aware of the various means available to her to actualize her personal interest. Acquiring the right opportunities then had the potential to positively impact her circumstances. This is why she sought after them.

There are many factors that lead Tiawan to move to Sioux Lookout and leave her community and the abusive relationship. Leaving also meant learning to let go of Christian values incongruent from her desires. In the end, the small town dynamics of familiarity and

close-knit (closed) community factored heavily in her decision to only return twice and, since then, not return.

Tiawan's desire for change was a culmination of having experiencing enough of the violence and learning and knowing within that the timing was right to embark on her personal healing journey. "Through my own healing, I realized...that I am an important person. That I do deserve to live a good life; that the Creator didn't put me here to suffer."

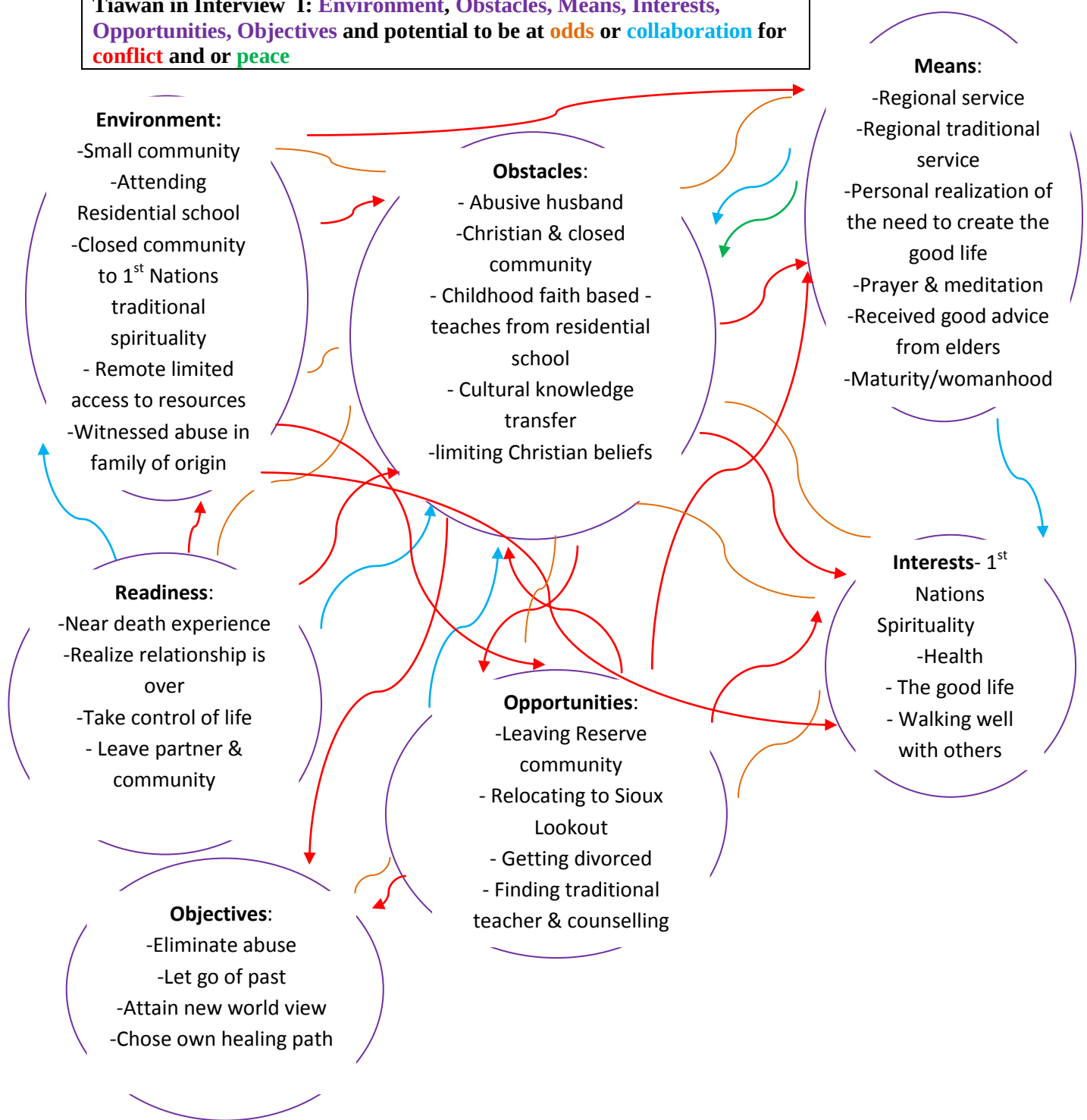
After leaving her community and travelling to Sioux Lookout, the catalyst that encouraged her to pursue counselling which also initiated the path toward healing is described;

I was looking at this chart one time, called the cycle of violence, and I realized that the situation I was in the whole time, there would be the 'honey mood phase', 'build-up', and then the 'blow-up'. And I realized that I did play my role in the cycle, by my behaviour too. Even though I wasn't the one who drank, and I played my role to try to get out of there as safely as I could. I think when I saw that, and from other things I heard, from the sweat lodge, your thoughts and your behaviours that you have to change too. Because those also come from your experiences and most situations you encounter you draw from experience. But when you are not sure of yourself anymore, you have to step back and try to find a new way of coping through that.

For her, counseling was an act of re-empowerment. Also access to traditional First Nations teachings (such as the Seven Grandfather Teachings on honesty, humility, truth, wisdom, love, respect, and bravery⁵⁵) became central to her conception of a meaningful spirituality. This invariably enabled her to actualize the process of intra-personal reconciliation more deeply.

4.3.1 Mapping the domestic violence conflict in Tiawan's story

Tiawan in Interview I: Environment, Obstacles, Means, Interests, Opportunities, Objectives and potential to be at odds or collaboration for conflict and or peace



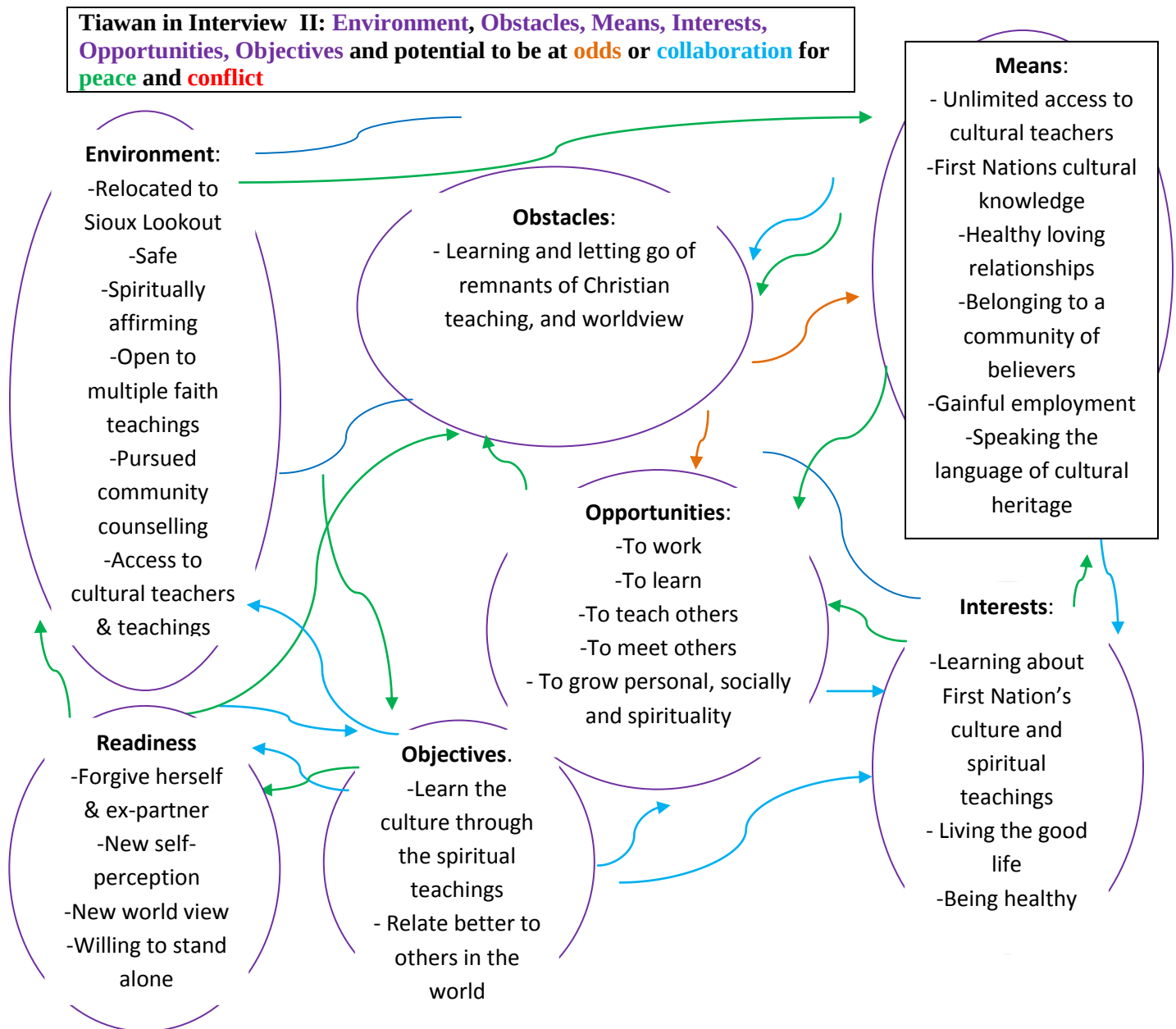
Traditional teachings echoing forgiveness made a central impact in her approach to healing. Letting go of abuse and incongruent Christian teachings better situates her to receive the new (Seven Grandfather) teachings. Adopting a new world view has thus awakened and revitalizes her heart, mind, or body, “I feel like I am growing as a person. My healing journey is still going on, and it probably will go on for the rest of my life. But the choices that I will make from now on I feel good about them”.

Follow-up Interview

The purpose of this interview was to learn how the conflict was being resolved from an intra-personal reconciliation perspective. On September 1st, 2010, seven months following the first interview, the second interview with Tiawan was scheduled in Sioux Lookout. The participant chose to meet the researcher in person at the location she resided.

Diagram 4.3.2 below illustrates that being in the new environment (Sioux Lookout) enabled Tiawan to capitalize on the various means, and opportunities available to assist her in actualizing her interest and objectives. This invariably minimized the DV obstacles she initially faced. Many of the coloured arrows are denoting blue, which means there are many opportunities for collaborations between these categories. The two orange arrows identify the potential for odds between the obstacles, means and opportunities. None of the actions she engaged in, in all the categories could have transpired without her internal readiness to do it.

4.3.2 Mapping Tiawan's intra personal reconciliation post domestic violence



Since February, Tiawan revealed that her “life is awesome!” She accredited her personal growth to the new learning (of the Seven Grandfather teachings) she is exposed to and because she is actualizing them.

I have grown because I encountered a situation where I had to think about all the positive things I have been learning and how to apply them to conflict at work. I

ended up leaving my job because I felt really disrespected there. It affected the balance in my life. I wanted to walk away from that. I felt really good about it. Everything worked out. Because I have never felt so good in my life, I didn't want to jeopardize that. All the teachings I got and all the counselling I got worked to my advantage in that situation.

Acknowledging what made the difference, she indicates it "was something I heard a lot at the Sweat Lodge; it's that the Creator did not put me here to suffer, to feel that way. Nothing is worth that, you have to keep that balance within yourself. You have to go with what makes you happy. Never mind anything else. You're what is important."

Tiawan highlighted that she struggled with leaving some Christian teachings behind. Particularly, the 1st Commandment stipulating that humanity is to have no other God other than the Creator. Although being exposed to two different world view has played a varied role in Tiawan's journey, she still sees them as relational. In her experience with Christianity, God associated with Jesus was not presented as a loving God. He was presented as a vengeful God (all are going to Hell if they don't accept Him). Now, "it's just that I am learning a new view through the Sweat Lodge. And that it's all about love and your experiences here and that you can learn from them". In Tiawan's view, "it is up to us what kind of path we want to walk, how you want to maintain that balance. What kind of things you want to absorb in yourself". And now, she has developed a coping strategy that seems to meet her need.

Tiawan expressed that self-worth and acceptance are some of the outcomes she experienced as a result of learning about First Nations teachings. She also learnt about love and her relationship with the Creator from a loving context. She began to experience closure with her complacent reserve community, and the DV she experienced after returning to the reserve community on two occasions. Closure for her was deepened after she received a divorce from her spouse.

Tiawan's path toward reconciliation was a purposeful choice. She was ready to start over. This choice has empowered her with a new identity that is symbolically represented in a name change. This change represents her colour and regalia printed on her personal hand drum. For her the opportunity to acquire a new identity was important as it physically marked her transformation from an existence shaped by pseudo-Christian belief (learned at residential school) into a more meaningful conception of love, and a Loving Creator.

The meaning derived from mapping Tiawan's story is that even in one's experience with conflicts opportunities can also arise. These opportunities may enable one to transform her identity. This transformation can be both positive and or negative. Choosing to gravitate toward First Nations spirituality is akin to pursuing her way.

4.4 Interviewee III- Introducing Levene from Neway

Levene is a First Nations female over the age of eighteen who resides on a reserve in north western Ontario. At the time of the interview, she had one child, a two year old girl. Levene perceives herself as every woman. She states, "I consider myself to be everything, a mother, daughter, sister, and I want to be a traditional woman too because all my life since I was a little girl I wanted to be in my own traditional way..." She learned about the study at the First Step Women's Shelter in Sioux Lookout, Ontario. She saw a poster advertising the research and decided to participate.

She has been living in Sioux Lookout for one year. She believes it is a good place live because "it seems like help is just around the corner." The domestic violence she experienced and spoke about on February 19th, 2010 occurred in 2003, with her then boyfriend. They were in a relationship on and off for three to four years. She describes the nature of violence below;

At first he was loving. I thought he cared about what I wanted. Then as time went by he slowly changed. It then seem like the man I met was not the same person. It was now a two faced man. There were a lot of abusive things he did to me. He gave me a lot of scars, a lot of bruises, he couldn't even let me go home when my mom would call and ask me 'do you want to come over and keep the kids while she go grocery shopping', I would say 'yes, sure'. Then I would tell my boyfriend after I hang up the phone and he would say, 'you are not going anywhere'. So I would have to call back my mom and say, "mom I can't come because I am going somewhere with John and Bob". I would start making excuses for him even though I had to stay home. When I would go home people would ask what happened to you, and my mom would joke around and say "she fell". Because she knew what was going on with me, I kind of told her and I guess she felt it too from her own experiences.

I went to clinics for appointment, and I would talk about it. She [the nurse] asked me if I wanted help, but I said no because I was scared of him. She asked me if I wanted to tell the Cops, I said no. It seem like they won't help me. So I went it alone. I was scared so I just went back with him and tried to make it right. Try not to make him mad. Just give him what he wants. I then had to give myself to him all the time when he wanted to have sex.

The length and nature of the abusive relation was complex. There were deep issues of power, intimidation and fear driving it, "I didn't want him to be my boyfriend since I found out what he was like. But he just kept coming back. He said he would hurt me or somebody that I would date other than him. So I just kept going back to him."

When asked how she coped with the abuse, she articulated the extensive self-directing approach followed; "how I got through. I just left it behind me. I deserved better than that. I deserve a better man than he was. I didn't want my daughter to see that. When I was a girl I seen that. The way I see it, is that I don't want my daughter to see that. For me it is easy to leave it." Having her daughter helped her decide to leave the abusive relationship and her community.

My daughter I guess. My daughter made me realize a lot of things? My daughter made me realize things that I didn't see before. Like, first I didn't care about myself until my daughter came into this world. I realize things that I don't want to be on that path I was on before. I wanted a new path, a good path instead of violence.

The strength to leave the abusive relationship also derived from listening to her inner voice. After breaking up with the abusive boyfriend, she was able to listen to it more closely, and better cope. This intuitive voice encouraged her as such:

She told me that ‘you don’t need to drink. You are better than that. You could do it, you don’t need him. You are a pretty girl, you are strong. You could go through anything, since you have been through that’. It seems like [DV experience] it made me a stronger person. I don’t want him to know that. He might think that he’s the man.

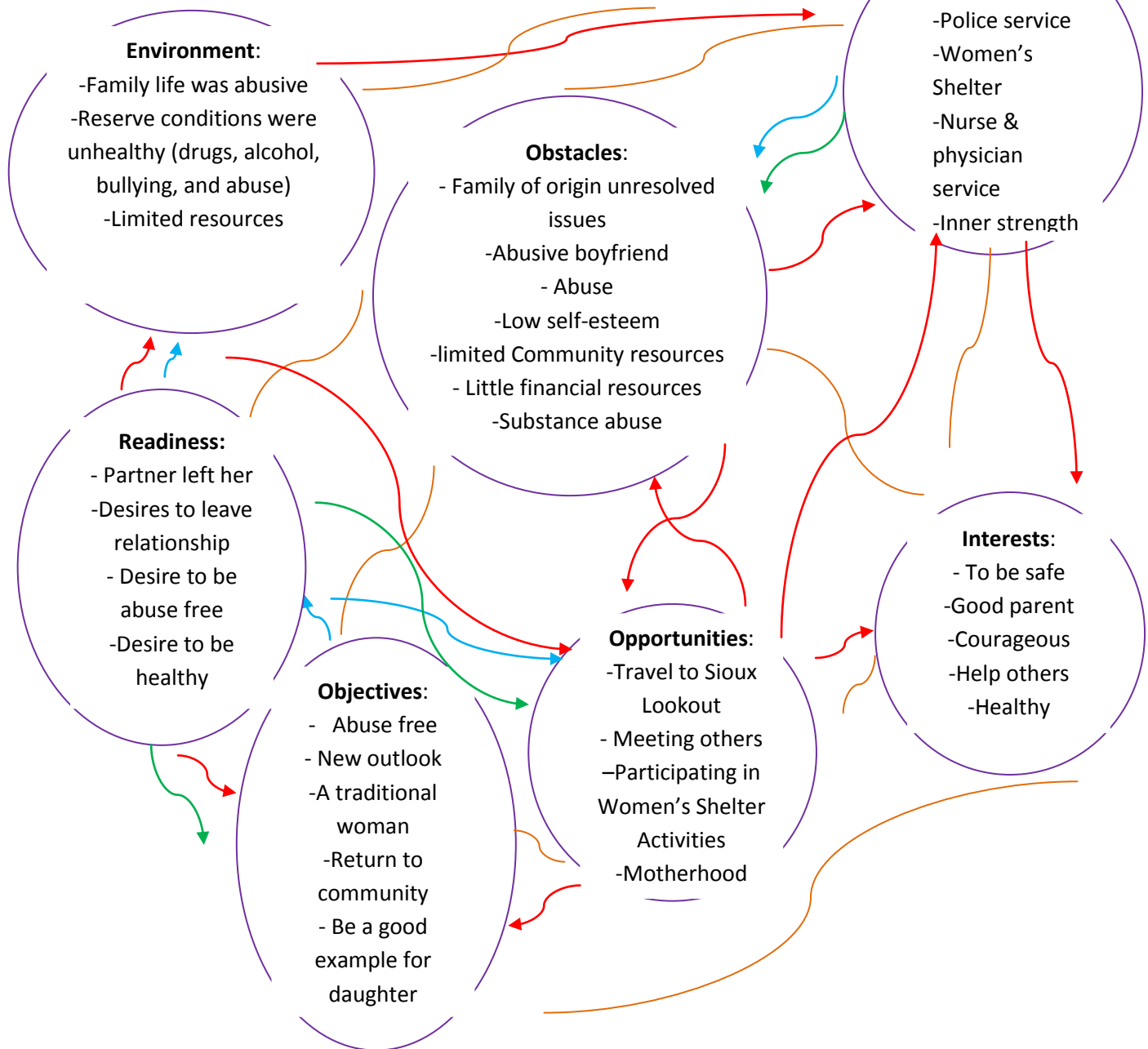
As it appears, expressions of spirituality can surface in many forms. For Levene, it manifested itself as she learnt about herself and began to find meaning from her life experiences. Engaging the self-directed approach to healing enabled her own personal creativity to surface (in poems) and they illustrated her deep feelings and emotions. This process of emotional excavation in a common sense is still connected to spirituality. She thus describes the meaning of spirituality in terms of her lived experiences:

When I came out here in Sioux that is when I started to talk about the abusive stuff. Because there were a lot of women around who were struggling with it too. I saw other women and I wished there was a way that us women could stop this. I couldn’t think of any. So I wrote a poem, ‘sorry for a woman’. For me I would say that, I could take all these things in the past that you have learnt from and put them all together and try to make them better for you in your life for you to go on. I know it’s a hard thing but you get through it.

The exercise of mapping Levene’s story below illustrates that many factors are shaping her responses to the conflict of DV. The red coloured line denotes conflict exists and led her to pursue change. The orange lines indicate the potential for many other unidentified factors over time to affect her circumstances. The blue and green lines are acknowledging the potential for collaboration and peace that she is already or became aware of.

4.4.1 Mapping domestic violence in Levene's story

Levene in Interview I: Environment, Obstacles, Means, Interests, Opportunities, Objectives and potential to be at odds or collaboration for peace and conflict



Follow-up Interview

In the seven to eight months following the first interview with Levene, there were many challenges which made keeping in contact less than ideal. However, on September 9th, 2010, we

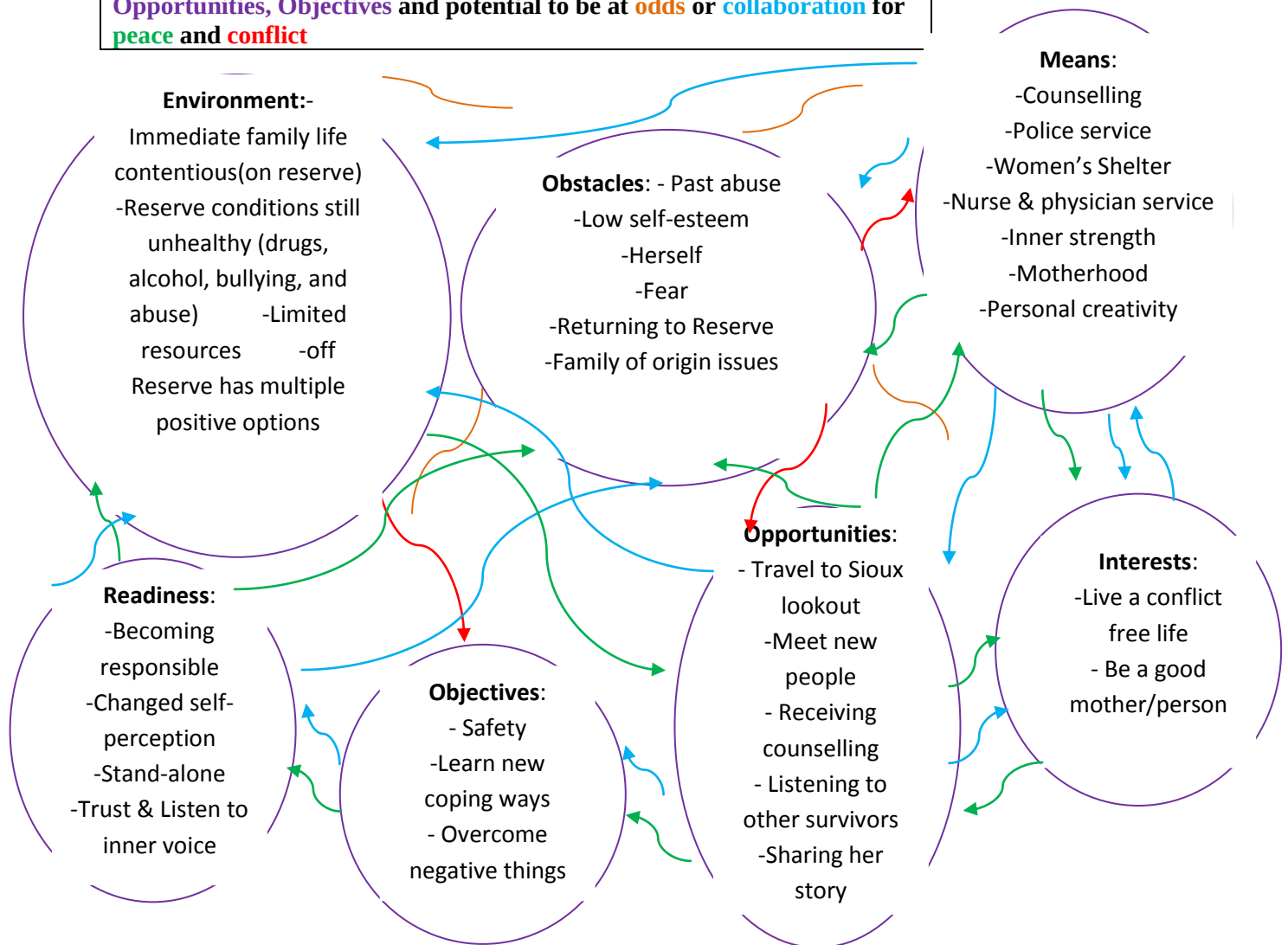
briefly connected over the phone. The phone call revealed that Levene had returned to her community and is staying with a relative. In a two minute conversation, she indicated that all was well with her and her daughter. She was given a toll free phone number to contact the researcher for the follow-up interview. On this call it was not a convenient time for her to talk extensively. Following this communication, the researcher made numerous (six or more) attempts to connect, and three times messages were left with relatives. However, no phone calls were returned.

On October 4th, 2010, another attempt to connect with Levene was initiated. After ringing two of the numbers, she was reached at the third number. When asked if she was willing or interested in the follow-up interview, she indicated “I don’t know, I don’t feel like talking right now.” When asked if there was a preferred time for her to talk with the researcher she did not indicate one. However, she did indicate that she still had the contacts for the researcher, whether or not she would use them, was not clear. She was thanked for her time and participation. That was the last communication.

Below in the diagram 4.4.2 , the flow of the coloured lines are meant to capture the various ways the categories mingled together to produce a specific process of self-reconciliation for Levene. The influence of her reserve environment (red arrows) was adversely implicated in the conflict. On the other hand, her new environments (i.e. women’s shelter or residing alone) in Sioux Lookout (green & blue) offered her multiple positive opportunities to pursue her objectives, and interests.

4.4.2 Partial peace -mapping Levene's intra personal reconciliation post domestic violence

Levene in Interview II: Environment, Obstacles, Means, Interests, Opportunities, Objectives and potential to be at odds or collaboration for peace and conflict



In the first interview, Levene's conception of intra-personal reconciliation meant, learning how to be and live without violence or abuse; to become a good person, a courageous and confident woman. Once she began to collaborate with the professionals in Sioux Lookout, and became comfortable sensing and trusting her female intuition, she was more encouraged to adopt a new approach to life. This new approach has opened her up to consider returning to her community to help others (both women and men) unlearn violence.

Being in Sioux Lookout offered her more options/means that enabled her to experience openness, safety, creativity, generous possibilities, and expose her to more random acts of kindness from others. This Redekop would say prepares the way for her to experience Mimetic Structures of Blessings. The presence of orange lines and red lines in the diagram seeks to acknowledge the potential for odds in the 'obstacles' category (pass abuse, low self-esteem, fear) to emerge at any time. They could potentially, jeopardize her self-reconciliation efforts.

Living on the reserve and witnessing violence and mal-adaptive coping methods have contributed to how she made decisions over the years. They are at the root of her experiences within abusive relationships. Other obstacles implicated in this are her low self-esteem and lack of self-actualization. They contributed to her not taking full advantage of the resources that were present in the reserve community. It took her leaving her community to escape from DV and begin the process of rebuilding a healthy self-image and esteem. Moreover, through counselling and participating in empowering activities (at the First Step Women's Shelter in Sioux Lookout), she was enabled to capitalize on some of the opportunities that began the process of redirecting her life. Leaving the abusive relation was both as a result of a personal choice (self-directing) and connected to her partners actions (he began seeing another woman).

On the subject of unearthing meaning, what can be extrapolated from Levene's story is that having access to positive resources on reserve or off can only become useful if they are valued by the one seeking. First, for a victim of violence to begin the process of self-help, she has to be ready and motivated beyond the layers of fear she has accepted as normal. Learning about the resources her community offers can be the first step towards self-help. Only when she is fully aware of what her community can do for her, can she then muster up courage and

approach the services for assistance. In turn and in time, she can even begin to address the issues of what can she do for herself and others both in and outside of her reserve community.

Second, Levene's experience with DV illustrates that violence is often on a multi-generational continuum. For change to occur, the cycle of violence needs to be understood and broken. She is recognising that to unlearn these behavior patterns is essential in her recovery and the lessons she will transfer to her daughter.

A third understanding Levene's story elucidates, is that relying only on one's inner strength (resilience/inner voice/ female intuition) without thoroughly educating oneself about the process to learn and unlearn conflict and violence can fall short of delivering one out of it. Especially, if an experience or conflict bigger than one's inner strength occurs, this could jeopardize an individual's desire and opportunity to live conflict free.

4.5 Interview IV—Introducing Rezara from Tuway

Rezara is a First Nations female that was born and raised on a reserve in northwestern Ontario. She was married for 15 years and is the mother of two children (a girl & a boy). She identifies as a Bible believing Christian. She relies totally on her faith values, bible reading and prayer to navigate through all aspects of her life. Life for Rezara when growing up entailed “going to church and participate in church activities.” Her upbringing was very influenced by a strict Mother, who was a devoted Anglican, and her Christian grandparents. She was educated at Northern University but currently works in a profession different from what she studied to be. As a result of the DV she experienced she decided to relocate to Sioux Lookout and leave the abusive relationship.

Rezara indicated the DV she experienced entailed her husband womanizing (literature refers to this as sexual violence), his substance usage and his verbal abuse. Not being able to eliminate the conflict, she fell into a deep depression. The depression experienced was mainly during her marriage and she describes the ways she felt at the time, “I just thought, why do I feel so down, when my faith should lift me up? There were so many things that were happening, when I was fully going into depression”.

When asked to define spirituality and to identify how her faith, beliefs and values assisted her to survive her circumstances, she described the following:

Even the Christian Nurse said to me “just keep praying, just keep praying, you are going to be ok”. Well that was truth, I am still o.k. right. But at that time it wasn’t getting better.

Yes. Somehow I managed to pull through. I think that is what I did. I think that is how it is when you truly believe in God, Jesus. Sometimes I think this is not me, this is not the way I want to do things, especially in my marriage.

Up to this point, the missing part in Rezara's experience was to be able to receive counselling advice in line with her beliefs, values and worldview. She identified that there was some challenge in acquiring this, but ultimately she received it. Rezera's decision to relocate to Sioux Lookout was life changing. She wanted to receive Christian counselling not traditional First Nations healing advice. In Sioux Lookout she was able to find two Christian counsellors to help her find meaning in her circumstance and achieve relief from spiritual, emotional and medical struggles.

Below in diagram 4.5.1., the coloured lines (similar to veins) represent the direction or flow of the categories in Rezara's story of DV. The red lines are outlining some of the varied ways the environment she resided in (remote, Christian, conservative closed community) impacted the conflict. As in all the other stories, orange lines signify the unspoken of nuances that are not identified by the interviewee. Blue and green lines are outlining that Rezara was aware that having means can also create opportunities and thus impact her circumstances. Means can enable her to pursue the interest and objectives she holds dear. To have access to means as is available in Sioux Lookout, also maximizes and facilitate her opportunities to engage desired changes.

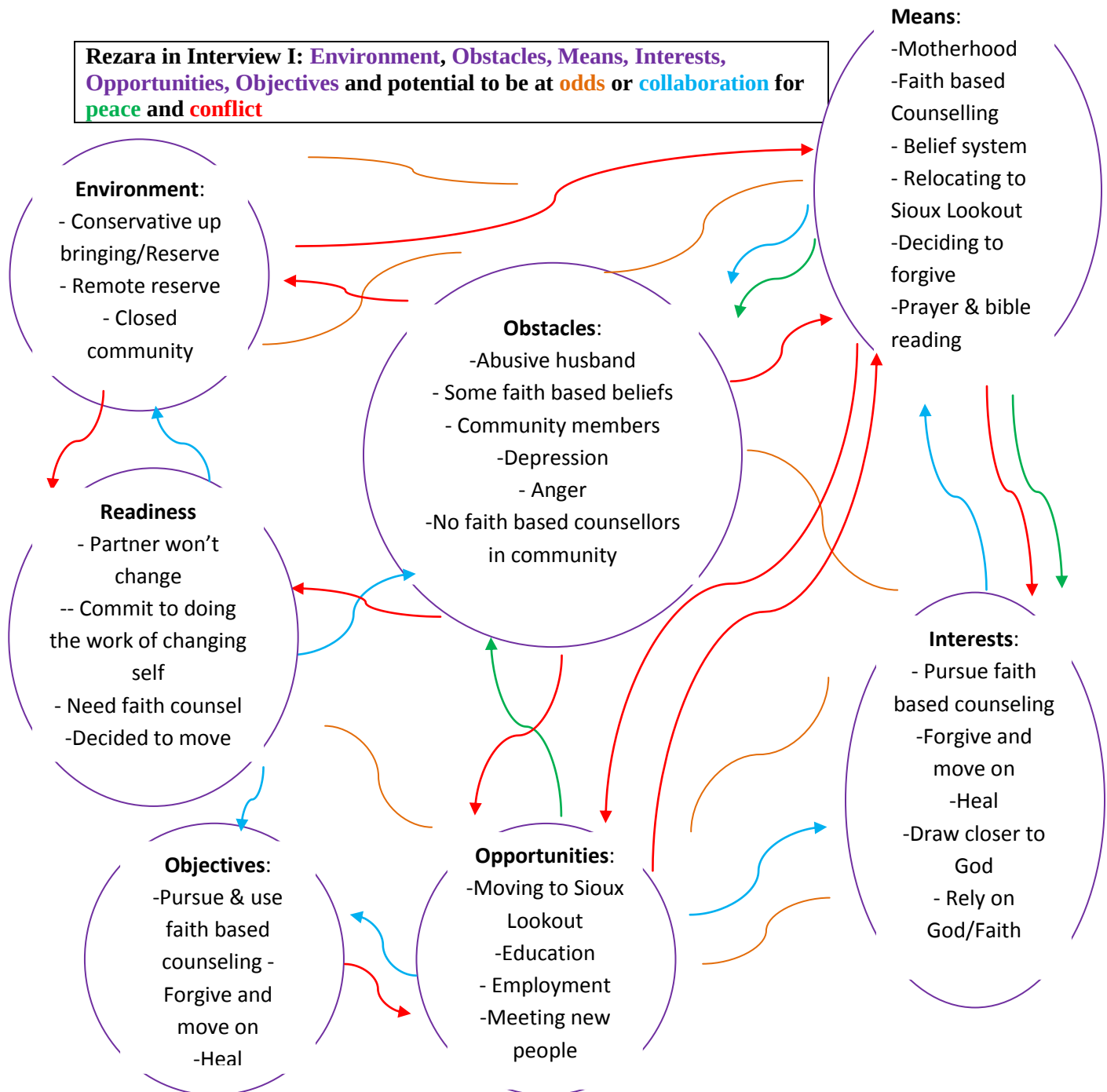
Her home environment (on the reserve) was a hindrance because of the conservative faith based up-bringing she had since childhood. As an adult, this contributed to her staying for fifteen years in her marriage, praying and hoping things would change. On the flip side, it can be said that the environment was also an asset. Herein, she learnt to value a closer relationship with God through the difficulties, this appreciation deepened her spirituality. At the core of the conflict, Rezara was able to recognize that her community was limited in assisting her to resolve the conflict and that she needed to relocate to Sioux Lookout to find a better way to cope. The

DV conflict generated the context (depression) wherein Rezara realized she needed more practical understanding to operationalize her faith based teachings to get her through and beyond the conflict.

Once Rezara acquired the tools to effectively work through the conflict, she was able to contextual her experiences in spiritually relevant terms. As a result, she matured in her relating to God by moving from a deferring posture to a collaborating mode of operation. First, she had to want (choose) and initiate the process of pursuing resources (Christian counselling) not readily available in her reserve community. Engaging in the Christian counselling process initiated the self-reconciliation she desired. Her goals were to forgive and move. She indicated “o.k. So I am just still praying for him and trying to forgive him. Moving on would feel like me feeling good about myself to know that I did that; to leave that guilt, pain or shame behind”.

Rezara experiences with DV challenged her faith beliefs. However, her spirituality as identified within a formal religious context played a central role in her coping strategy and her experience with Christian counselling. In the process, her healing journey encompasses learning the lessons of forgiveness and patience (Christian-spiritual fruits of the spirit).

4.5.1 Mapping domestic violence in Rezara's Story



Follow-up Interview

On August 31, 2010, Rezara's had her follow up interview. Although we kept in contact via-email sporadically, meeting face to face was the best option to convey all she desired to. Like the first interview, to protect her anonymity, the interview was held at the researcher's residence over lunch. When asked how her life story has unfolded since the February interview, and whether or not she used the counselling advice given, Rezara replied, "it just helped me a lot. I figured I am not the only one who is going through this. I have to make a change in my life, to change my thinking. So I find that it helped me." Recognizing this, she became more ready to initiate the process.

Visiting another country, and meeting others in similar and different circumstances gave also her an opportunity to listen and share with others. This proved to be a cathartic experience leading her into a new dimension on her healing journey. She illustrated what transpired, "when I was so depressed more like anxiety. ... only Jesus who can help you. That's what I was telling to this girl that I met in Mezavo her name is Cantelli, but she was single and twenty eight, she's got her whole life ahead of her. I told her, you need Jesus in your life."

The diagram 4.5.2 perfecting peace illustrates that being in the right environment is conducive to overcoming lives biggest obstacles. As the coloured arrows indicates, when obstacles are measured within the appropriate environment, the means, opportunities, individual's interest and objectives have the best likelihood to be actualized. For Rezara, being ready and deciding to leave her reserve community, marriage and relocate to Sioux Lookout proved to be most instrumental in her pursuit of self-reconciliation. The outcome was having

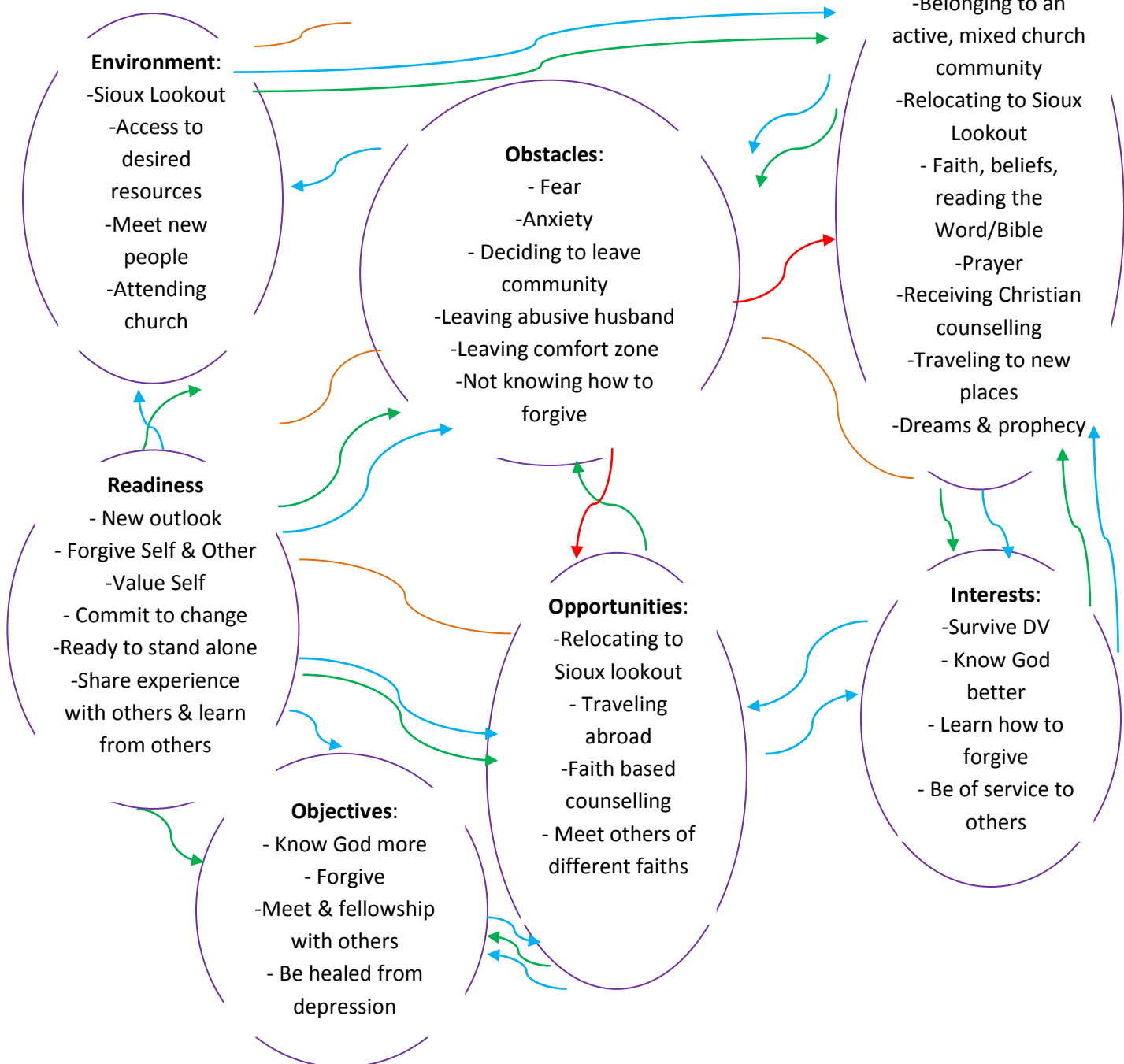
access to many opportunities for collaborations and peace between the seven categories. These opportunities presented themselves on multiple levels over a period of time.

Rezara reframed and interprets the conflict (with her abusive husband and the ensuing depression) as an opportunity for God to draw her closer to Him. Collaborating with him, and utilizing rituals like reading His Words in the Bible, believing in Jesus and stepping beyond her comfort zone to share her faith, enabled her to actualize a new context. Moreover, by facing her fears (both internal and those created by her community of care) she developed courage on the journey. This meant silencing every thought that was not in line with her objectives (to forgive and let go) and interests (acquire meaning in her new life).

At various junctures of her experience she also engaged the three faith-based coping strategies of deferring, collaborating and self-directing. In so doing, her spirituality was refined and her world view expanded. Surviving the conflict enabled her to see that having means and knowing how to optimize them is a key element in seeking personal change. Experiencing and surviving DV proved to be a twofold learning process. Although she lost a fifteen year intimate relationship, a closer one was gained with God. In the pursuit of self-reconciliation Rezara realizes that her interests and objectives have a better opportunity to come to fruition if she is able to forgive, move on from the DV experience and focus on her personal healing.

4.5.2 Perfecting peace -mapping Rezara's intra personal reconciliation post domestic violence

Rezara in Interview II: Environment, Obstacles, Means, Interests, Opportunities, Objectives and potential to be at odds or collaboration for peace and conflict



Rezara's story illustrates that while merit exists in faith based coping strategies, differing, collaborative and self-directing (Pargament, et al., 1988, 91-92; Wang, 2007, 8), concerns also emerge over how they are utilized. If spirituality and or faith based coping is properly utilized with assistance from trained professionals (health workers, counsellor, social worker, trained pastors, etc.), it could be a valuable tool for some DV victims/survivors. Particularly, those who are seeking faith based guidance and are already engaging similar teachings in their life.

4.6 Reflections-Immersion & Incubation

Secondary to finding participants for this research, I found the most challenging part in the field work process was keeping in contact with the participants. Even though we exchanged e-mails and telephone numbers, even though I opened an e-mail account specially to address the projects communication needs and acquired a long distance toll free line to avoid the participants incurring cost to call me, there were still innumerable challenges concerning keeping in contact.

Mainly the challenges related to mobility issues. Some of the participants were frequently in transit. Whether it was changing jobs, moving from or to a different location to set up a home life, traveling out of community to address personal, leisure or medical needs, keeping in touch proved difficult. Also, it was most stressful, because numbers were either not in service or no answer or e-mails were not received or returned. This made it impossible to coordinate the follow-up interviews on KO Tele health. So, I would reconsider using this method.

In two of the four participants' cases a third party was my constant source of information (link) as I tried to keep in contact. Without these community friends or relatives, I would not have been able to have the follow-up interviews. The information they provided was invaluable. They provided information on the participant's life and this filled the gap between us. I then used what was relayed to me as motivation to keep searching for the participants.

The fact that I reside in Ottawa while the participants lived in Sioux Lookout or on the reserve made it challenging to keep the lines of communication open. Not being able to physically travel to places that I

would be able to meet people who might better assist me with finding the participants also impacted consistent communication.

What I learnt most from this experience is that doing research with participants who reside in distant places can place an unusual degree of stress on the researcher and discourage the process. On the other hand, I have learnt much about caring for others, even in the most challenging circumstances.

Pursuing the participants (whether to have the interviews or because I genuinely desired their well keeping) served to open me up in ways I never expected it to. Case in point, when I was most inclined to abandon the process, thoughts concerning them would flood my heart and mind. In some instances, I would dream about them, or someone that I had spoken to about them in time past would follow-up with me concerning them. It was as if I was surrounded with concern for them. In the end, when contact was made, I felt joy in my heart. Simply hearing their voices and listening to them recounting their journey was like being connected with a long lost relative or dear friend I knew for years.

Hearing and learning about one of the four participants, Levene, left an unresolved emotional knot in stomach. I felt helpless as I learnt from her sister that she was not doing or keeping well. All I could do after many attempts to communicate with her was to wish her well. I could hope in my thoughts and pray that what she was going through (in a triangle relationship with her sister's boyfriend and pregnant with his child) will not lead to her ending her intra-personal reconciliation journey.

The interview process has taught me a lesson in caring for others when I did not intentionally plan to. However, learning by pursuing, how to show care for others in this way has created a sense of peace in my heart. It is

a lesson the participants indirectly blessed me with. In Christianity, caring (love/charity) is a fruit of the spirit that the Christian experience is to prune and nurture for its increase. The effort to stay connected with the participant's taught me a valuable lesson on my own personal spiritual journey. I am continually in need of pruning to better care for others (as it does not come naturally).

On the other hand, I was emotionally exhausted from searching for them. An additional lesson learnt is that care givers need to self-care. I now see in my own life as I reflected on the participant's experience, that spirituality is much more than feelings. It is a dynamic, multifaceted process that requires the whole heart, body and soul/thought/emotions, to be actively engaged in making internal and external changes, not only for research participants but for the researcher as well.

Interestingly, I learnt from the participants stories that spirituality cannot be forced. It has to be embraced in an "attitude of caring"⁵⁶ and be delicately balanced between old and new knowledge regarding values and teachings. It seems to mature best after enduring trials. Spirituality takes time to positively mature or negatively diminish.

4.7 Summary

Avena's various roles as a mother, healthy and productive citizen have all been shaped by the conflict of domestic violence. Deep love (i.e. as felt by a mother for a child or expressed by community of care) has a transformative power in the life of a victim. Persevering through violence has illustrated that in spite of negative experiences, a survivor can still maintain agency. These all can be positively informed by faith teachings. Also, experiencing DV can expose inadequate faith based teachings. Tiawan's story is illustrative of this. However, some changes in life require that individuals leave the violent environment (whether it is loveless or a non-supportive one), values and people behind in order to initiate and actualize desired internal peace.

For Levene, the deep love felt for her child enables her to focus overcome her experience with the DV conflict. This opened her up to another channel of strength (the female inner voice/intuition). Furthermore, over-coming some conflicts can enable the emergence of resiliency. Recognizing this can support one in finding meaning and purpose in the pursuit for a peaceful and productive life. A new dimension can emerge, agency. In a post conflict environment, a new world view can encourage empathy and the desire to help others in similar circumstances.

Some conflicts can draw one closer to her source of strength, as Rezara's story revealed. The blessing from this type of reconciliation seems to emerge when faith beliefs and practical tools (learning how to forgive yourself and the offender) collaborates together. Leaving a conflict environment for one of peace and persevering in practicing meaningful rituals (like reading, praying and learning from faith based teachings) can help heal the wounded and restore

hope. The impact of spirituality in all the stories is far reaching. It illustrates that spirituality is more than a feeling. Spirituality is a process concerned with faith teachings in action. If desired, it can be used as a powerful tool in the process of intra-personal reconciliation.

4.8 Common Trends

There were a few commonalities the participants shared that did not detract from their individuality imprinted in their stories. First, they all self-selected to engage in the research process. They saw the advertisement and were drawn to share their stories. This speaks to the notion that their readiness for change enabled them to seek out and engage with opportunities not previously recognized for self-expression.

Second, three of the four women had children and expressed a deep love and commitment to addressing violence in their lives to minimize transference of generational traumas (i.e. childhood sexual abuse, family dysfunction, substance abuse or spiritual abuse) and to ultimately protect them. In a way, their love opened them up to multiple levels of understanding and meaning in life. It generated a deep sense of value and purpose that they drew impetus from to begin the process of and sustain change.

Sioux Lookout played a significant role in the transformation process of all the participant's lives. They all valued what it symbolically presented— a healing place as it provided some distance from their community where the violence occurred. It also enabled them to foster personal autonomy. Yet, it was close enough (one hour flight or accessed by road) that they were able to image and if desire, return to. In Sioux Lookout, there is a substantial population of First Nations to interact with. There exist many institutions providing access to services (that are general or cultural).

The general atmosphere is conducive to transformation, in that many lakes and forest exist in close proximity to the town which enables one to find quietness. The participants' all saw life differently as a result of what they survived from. This enabled a new world view of themselves, community, their ex-spouse/partner, and society. From this new location, two wanted to return to their community to impact change in other women and men's lives, and two want to move on without retuning. It would be interesting to know if other women in other towns have a place as this to retreat, reorient and recreate themselves within.

On spirituality, religious beliefs and coping strategies, all the participants stories represented the broad spectrum that was unearth in the literature. Interestingly, their worldview was either shaped by or in relation to some aspect (negative or positive) or notion of spirituality or religious teachings. Whether they referred to the shaping of the core of their humanity in terms of spirituality or religious beliefs did not detract from their recognition of an internal disposition that required healing. Their stories were illustrative that developing an understanding of the inner spirit is necessary. In doing so, they were able find more that they expected— either that something important was lacking or something valuable was neglected.

Chapter Five:

5.0 Meaning Making

Guided by Redekop's (2002a) three levels (collecting bytes, organizing them into a coherent narrative with causal connections/unlocking structures of conflict and generating theoretical insights) to generate understanding through interpreting and using the interviewee's experiences, the researcher's aim is to first answer the fundamental research questions: How exactly does spirituality or religious belief affect some First Nations women who experience DV? What are the religious or spiritual resources they draw from? When do these come into play? What are the nuances of this in relation to all the factors in their lives?

Second, from an academic perspective build theory on the GT meaning elucidated by the stories using Redekop's (2002a) conception of reconciliation. Although his concept of reconciliation, which is normally used to invoke interpersonal or inter group dynamics has been revised (2012), the earlier version (consisting of 13 elements) will be utilized herein to further elaborate how meaning can emerge from varied context of violence (DV). The earlier version is more user friendly to a non-academic audience.

Seeing that reconciliation can emerge from the initial point of readiness it is important to note it may be applied asymmetrically. In that, it can refer to a process by which an individual come to terms with past circumstances and relationships. In doing so, one can re-envision and actualize a life without violence and pursue one of blessings.

Third, in an open reflective mode, the researcher engages with the spiritual lessons learnt (by doing GT research on spirituality) to enable a more rounded theoretical understanding.

5.1 Integrating emergent themes from theory into practice

Redekop (2001) posits that theory helps one to perceive things in a particular circumstance or predicament. Without this, many aspects of a reality perhaps would go unnoticed. This begs the question, what can the theory of Mimetic Structures of Blessings reveal concerning the story of the four participants? Moreover, Redekop (2002a) indicated that the positive elements in a mimetic structure are the foundation from which he derived the concept of blessing. At its core, blessing emerges within a relational system that uplifts and enables charity (love) and the mutual desire of wellbeing for all parties to take shape.

He also builds on Ken Wilber's idea that reconciliation is dually experienced. As such, he asserts that "reconciliation is something that can be experienced from the inside and observed from the outside" (287). Both the inside experience and the outer depiction are symbiotically related. Furthermore, "as one is reconciled within one's self, it contributes to reconciliation with one's other, and as reconciliation begins with one's Other it helps one be reconciled within" (ibid).

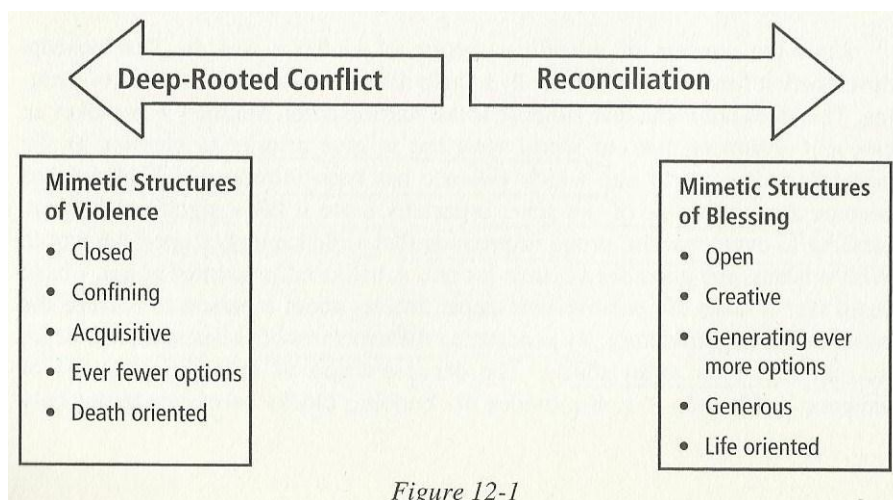
In terms of terminology, according to Redekop (2002a, 287), "reconciliation has two significant moments. The first is an escape from the mimetic structure of violence brought about by the deep-rooted conflict. The second is the creative construction of mimetic structures of blessing. Each of these has a dynamic, back and forth quality."

Additionally, Redekop indicated that a person's emotions are highly implicated in the reconciliation process (288). This suggests that when beginning the process of self or intra personal reconciliation, an individual has to work through the layers or mental barriers that perhaps led or kept her into the violent context. Without this, it would be difficult to experience

the “inner transformation” that the process purports. This transformation “involves the brain and heart working in time to reverse a default setting containing a combination of trauma, victimization, and violence” (ibid., 289). However, to get to a place of reconciliation either with self or other, there are some steps that are key elements to be acknowledged as part of the process.

The working out of these key elements (dealing with the pain, creating a safe space, breaking the trance, introducing or recalling teachings, Embark on Gradual Reciprocated Initiatives in Tension-Reduction (GRIT), truth-telling, signalling remorse and forgiveness, identity transformation, creating rituals, healing, reframing, structural change, and celebration) can enable reconciliation (290-302). This is significant, seeing that reconciliation can be seen as “akin to reproduction” or “to the creation of [a] new life” (ibid., 290).

From a neo-conflict resolution perspective, for reconciliation to be seen, the trajectory of the participant’s lives must be depicted on a readiness continuum. This enables a smoother transition from Mimetic Structures of Violence into Mimetic Structures of Blessing. Below, Redekop depicts what the process entails (2002a, 256, Fig. 12-1); diagram 5.5.1.



Although, chapter four did not refer to the participant's story as a deep rooted conflict entrenched in mimetic structure of violence (as it was not the purpose of the study to establish this), the above elements in the diagram were present in all four stories.

Mason (1996) outlined that a researcher dissatisfied with analysis that reflects either positivist or realist views can consider an interpretivist view concerning the data the research generates. So from a "broadly interpretivist view, the role of the researcher is to understand every day or lay interpretations, as well as supplying social science interpretations, and to move from these towards an explanation" (140).

According to Charmaz (2006) it is by "studying your data [that it] prompts you to learn nuances of your research participant's language and meanings" (34). In this section, the process of unearthing meaning is loosely built from a GT (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) approach of theoretical coding where variant degrees of open, relational, variational and discriminate sampling is utilized. She also indicates that in meaning making "coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data" (46). To this end, GT offers a flexible approach for the researcher to leap from the general to specific or concrete events and build structured meaning from the descriptions endemic in the life world of the participants.

The four (Avena, Tiawan, Levene and Rezara) participants stories will now be examined to elucidate how meaning can be derived from the lived experiences of some female Aboriginal DV survivors. Their stories will provide answers to the research questions and shed some light on the process of reconciliation they engendered.

5.2 Answering the Questions

Qualitative research demands that the questions of the research be explored systematically. To this end, how exactly does spirituality or religious belief affect First Nation's women who experience DV? What are the religious or spiritual resources they draw from? When do these come into play? What are the nuances of this in relation to all the factors in their lives?

Using the broad categories of spirituality and religious beliefs, what the research has outlined is that some First Nations women define these and experience them differently. Moreover, the broad categories can affect some women deeply, transiently or negligibly. How the term is perceived ultimately impact the role it plays in the participant's thoughts and governs their actions.

All the resources the participants drew upon were not incongruent with previous assertions of the meaning of spirituality, as spirituality can be understood in terms of the breath, courage, vigor or life (Ingersoll (1994) in Knox et al. (2005, 287) in an individual. In fact, the resources the participants drew from seem to exemplify this notion well. As such four spiritual or religious ways emerged. First, the participants all looked to the previous teachings they already had. Second, if or when previous teachings failed to provide guidance in conflict circumstances, an individual either chose to abandon previous teachings or sought out and adopt new ones. Third, in the absence of concrete spiritual teachings, life lessons emerge from an individual's past experience to inform her present choices. In this instance, an inner capacity is engaged that (inner voice/intuition) which offers encouragement and ultimately bolster courage

to act in a desire way. Fourth, an individual in conflict can draw resources to mitigate it from their beliefs.

The above affects and resources that spirituality and or religious beliefs engender seem to all operate within a particular context of time. The individuals had to exhibit a readiness to engage their internal resources (beliefs, teachings, perceptions, etc.) and decide to pursue their desired violence free context, within the confines of community or regionally available external resources. All the participants similarly resembled each other at the stage of readiness; they all possessed an internal longing for peace, decided to make an escape from violence, determined the relationship is irretrievable broken, and were content to stand alone.

Case in point, Avena reverted back to the childhood spiritual teachings that served to instruct her in how best to be what she desired, to be a good, healthy loving person/parent. Tiawan's near death experience and desire of a violence free life led her to the places wherein she can unlearn violence and learn peace (through First Nation's spiritual teachings). Most of the participants ultimately realized their limitation to overcome their DV circumstances alone; however, the readiness emerged in Levene and Rezara context surfaced in relation to the actions of their abuser (he left them). Yet still, all needed outside professional counseling to assist them structure their approach.

In terms of what are the nuances of spirituality and or religious beliefs in relation to all the factors in their lives, these categories carry weight in so far as they provide self-affirming, practical teachings that govern the thinking and actions of individual adherents. The upcoming paragraphs will explore the GT results from the perspective of reconciliation.

5.3 Thirteen tenants of reconciliation in four stories

This section seeks to explore how the four participants attempts (think and act) to enable internal peace and mitigate the DV conflict experienced. How can Redekop (2002a) theory of reconciliation elicit meaning from the four stories? The tenants of reconciliation emerged in each story differently and not necessarily sequentially.

For the participants, “**dealing with the pain**” took on many forms. Case in point, Avena, Tiawan, Levene and Rezara all left their abusive partners, left the Reserve community, and moved to Sioux Lookout (permanently or for a time). While there, they all sought out some form of counselling (counseling psychology, First Nation’s counseling or relied on or learnt about new faith teaches). Both Avena and Tiawan respectively participated in Aboriginal rituals (Pow Wows, Sweat Lodge) that helped them on load the burden of pain they carried. Levene participated in activities organized by the Women shelter in Sioux Lookout, wrote poems and shared them to release her pain. Rezara, engaged her faith teachings through counseling with Christian counsellors, and then shared her experiences with others.

To “**create a safe space**” what the women did was to first leave the site of violence (their partners, and reserve community) and then relocate to a neutral environment. All of them for a short time (Avena & Levene) or permanently relocated (Tiawan & Rezara) to Sioux Lookout. While in Sioux Lookout they became acquainted with the regional resources (Women’s Shelter, Children Protective Services, Counseling (First Nations & non First Nations), Social Services and legal system available to them. Through these mechanisms they began the process of rebuilding safety in an immediate and long term sense. They also availed themselves of court orders so that they could be safe from their ex’s.

How they initiated the process to “**break the trance**” was first based on their deep desire to establish a new life/ a good life. They re-envisioned the abuser as an individual who is also internally suffering from abuse/violence. They realized that leaving the relationship and relocating meant ending the reach of the abuser’s power over them. For Avena, leaving her husband and community for a time enabled her to see that his intimidation tactics hold no more power over her than she allows. Tiawan decided she did not want the marriage after a near death experience and separation from her spouse. The distance enabled her to constructively reflect on his family of origin issues as well as her own actions in the conflict. Levene listened to her intuition that confirms she deserves more than the abuser was offering. Rezara, realized her struggle would not end without her action, because her partner was not interested to change (he had a problem with womanizing). This enabled her to see that she had to adjust her thinking which instructed her to leave the relationship.

The participants were creative in their efforts to “**introduce or recall teachings**”. Avena used the fond memories of childhood with her Christian grandmother’s teaching, to initiate the process of becoming “a good person, a sun flower not a weed”. Tiawan drew inspiration/desire from what she learnt from her father’s story telling concerning their culture and traditions. Levene used the wisdom garnered from past experience as well as her intuition. Rezara relied on biblical teachings and learnt new ones from Christian counseling and new Christian friends to better operationalized forgiveness and moving on.

The participant’s efforts to “**embark on Gradual Reciprocated Initiatives in Tension-Reduction (GRIT)**” best illustrates that reconciling with the Other (abuser) is not necessary or sufficient when dealing with DV. What is most important is that the victim/survivor safely and sincerely makes an effort (did her part) to redirect her emotional/intellectual energy into a life

outside of the conflict. This does not necessarily involve the construction of a good or new relationship with the Other or the community.

For Avena, after leaving her spouse, she informed him of her legal intentions in relation to gaining custody of their children and later the dissolution of marriage. Tiawan did not engage in community rumours about her spouse following their separation, she prayed for him, and eventually sought no contest in the divorce proceedings. Levene did not retaliate against her boyfriend when he left her for another woman. She took the opportunity to pursue a life without him. Rezara tried marriage counselling, prayer, and conversing with her spouse on how best to try and salvage the marriage after years of infidelity. In two (Avena & Levene) of the four participant's new outlook, they indicated they would like to return back to the community to help others similar to them in whatever way possible.

In the “**truth-telling**” efforts, the participant's best illustrated how they played a part in the violence. Tiawan indicated that for a time she enabled the abusive partner's behavior. Avena outlined how she initially retaliated (by beating up the other women, and using banded substances) against the violence by using violence. Levene used drinking to try and minimize the relationships adverse impact. For a time, Rezara resigned herself to the abuse.

Each participant's interpretation of spirituality shaped their efforts in “**signalling remorse and forgiveness**”. Avena's childhood Christian beliefs that teaches her to be kind and respectful to others, enabled her to keep the lines of communication open about her children with her spouse during their separation. Tiawan decided to let the abuse with her ex-spouse go that she may be lighter in spirit. Levene chose not to fight or get depressed but rather see her

boyfriend leaving her as an opportunity to start a new life. Rezara's used her faith and faith based counseling to reach the goal of forgiving her abuser and the other women in the picture.

The “**identity transformation**” of the participants came about as a result of their renewed sense of self. As they began to value and re-envision themselves without violence they took on a new form. Avena lost weight, and her outlook on life changed from ‘I am not worthy’ to ‘I am worth it’. Tiawan's name change best reflects the spiritual meaning her journey now encapsulates as taught by the spiritual teacher educating her in the Seven Grand Father teachings. Levene is working toward leaving behind the shy, self-conscious, insecure woman she was in the abuse context, to become a confident, outspoken, strong woman. Rezara is using her faith based teachings to encourage her to step outside her comfort zone and reach out to other women. To not be afraid to meet others and has travelled to another country to work with the less fortunate.

The “**rituals created**” in the new life the participants are advancing are meant to affirm their new vision of self. Avena as a health conscious person, good mother, uses daily exercise, bible reading and the ever present desire to know the Creator to keep her on course. Tiawan relies on participating in First Nations cultural activity to maintain her balance. She attends Sweat Lodge, engages in smudging ceremonies, offer prayers, gives tobacco and participate in drumming circles as positive outlets to keep her in the new orientation (First Nations spirituality) she values most. Levene's participation in the Women's Shelter ‘take back the night’ events and poem writings became meaningful ways to release past hurts and keep her focused on the new approach to live a violence free life. Rezara uses the new collaborations with women of other faiths as a resource that can encourage her on her journey, while still engaging in prayer, Bible reading and church attendance.

The “**healing**” that has emerged in the participant’s stories thus far can be understood in terms of how they have pursued help. For Avena, leaving the abuse behind and focusing on her role as a good woman and mother satisfies something inside her. Also, to return to the faith she learned of during childhood seems to be meeting her need to connect with a higher force (The Creator). Tiawan acknowledges that her healing is on a continuum, one that she chooses and closely lives in relation to (practicing the Seven Grandfather’s teachings). For Levene, becoming a strong woman is an active way to heal. Taking the good lessons learnt from her past experiences and applying them in her new context. Rezara views healing as a gift from God that she had to work with Him to actualize. She has learned that one has to learn how, and chose to forgive in order to move on from the past. As well, be a blessing or source of encouragement to others.

The act of “**reframing**” the DV context was different for each woman. Avena sees her experience with DV as a catalyst for changing herself physically and mentally. From being treated as unworthy to worthy of love and care. Tiawan sees her experience with DV as an opportunity to unlearn family of origin violence, and to renegotiate her spiritual beliefs—to question and change the incongruent (Christianity) teachings for more congruent (Seven Grandfather teachings) ones she values. Levene saw her experience as something that made her stronger. It connected her to her inner strength and intuition. Rezara understands her experience as an opportunity for God to teach her how to actualize her Christian beliefs, such as forgiveness and patience.

The “**structural change**” in this context focuses on the how the institutions within reach of the four women were engaged in their efforts to actualize reconciliation. All four women at some point in their travels to Sioux Lookout received tangible guidance, practical assistance

from the regional counselling agencies, cultural centers, women shelter, social services, churches or legal system.

The “**celebration**” that emerged from the participant’s story could be viewed in two ways. First, they succeeded in leaving the abusive context. Second, they were able to un-learn violence and acquire new skills to enable them to pursue a life less focused on violence and more inclined toward peace. Avena is joyous about her new way of life and how it is transferring onto her children. Tiawan is happy her First Nation’s spiritual outlook has contributed to a healthier, confident self, which has attracted a new partner that better compliments her. Levene’s hope was restored as she listened to her inner capacity. Rezara is joyous as she is learning to forgive and let go of past wrongs committed against her. Instead, what emerges is love for others in unexpected places.

5.4 The Intersection of old and new knowledge

The research outlined in chapter two (literature review) generated a lot of knowledge concerning Aboriginal women, DV, IPV, abuse and how they are coping. This rich display of data proved to be useful in contextualizing a general Canada wide scope of violence and its impact on Aboriginal women’s lives. Moreover, it also provided a clearer picture of the types of knowledge past and present research affords on the subject matter.

It is important to note that not all Aboriginal women experience life in the same way. However, it would be interesting to compare from the literature review and the research findings the elements that are similar and those that are different in some women’s experience of DV. As well as, illustrate how they have pursued reconciliation. Highlighting the varied ways some have pursued their healing or self-reconciliation journey could situate useful tools of coping.

Additionally, having more tools in one's personal tool box to enable better resolution of conflicts (interpersonal and personal) could at least offer if not new, cross regional approaches to addressing long-standing or common issues.

All of the researchers discuss in chapter two have implicated colonialism as a root cause in the present multiple forms of conflict Aboriginal women are faced with. To this end, the most effective remedy seems to be one that must encapsulate the re-education of both Aboriginal males and females. This re-education must be in cultural relevant terms that promote values and beliefs that seek to preserve indigenous family structure, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. This is important as although Aboriginal women experience more DV or IPV than men, according to Murdock (2001) they are also perpetrators of it. These high rates are also well evidenced in Yuen's (2008) work on Federal Sentenced Women (FSW).

Previous research also indicated that the role of a strong and healthy community supported by good leadership not tolerant of or complacent with DV, IPV or abuse cannot be understated. Almost all of the researchers on this subject matter agree on this. In addition, in seeking out an organic, culturally competent approach to addressing this type of violence, authors (Galbraith 2005, Viel 2005, Goudreau 2006, Wang 2007, Yuen 2008, Taylor 2010, and Harper 2011), to varying degrees have spoken about the important role Aboriginal spiritual activities (Sweat Lodges, smudging, etc.) and faith based values and rituals (prayer, fellowshiping, bible reading) can and must play in approaches that seek to address holistic healing. To do this would be honoring an Aboriginal worldview of wellbeing that encapsulates all aspects of an individual, the physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual.

When the understanding generated by the previous research is juxtaposed beside participant's experiences it becomes clearer that regardless of regions, some Aboriginal women do experience similar multiple levels of violence. They experienced it during childhood from within their family of origin, in their immediate family (with their spouse or partner), and in society, as they interact with service providers (justice, health care, social service and education systems).

A common theme among many stories was the strong impact of the love they held for their children. Or, the love they felt during childhood or did not receive from adult influence (such as parents, grandparents, relatives, teacher, etc.). Case in point, it was in their role as mother's some women first felt love in their heart, and then expressed it toward their children. This in turn influenced their healing journey because with this love they were able to perceive their value and turn it into hope, in the face of violence. For some, it enabled them to become focused and provided meaning (caring for their children) to their lives. For others, becoming healthy, physically and emotionally bolstered courage to leave the abuser in search of a safer, better life.

In analyzing Avena's story, it appeared that there are many similarities with the other aboriginal women's stories of violence and healing previously outlined. In her story the love she possesses for her children shines. It also provides an impetus to change her context from violence to peace. The point of departure Avena's story offers is that good lessons (teachings) learned at an early age are easier to recall. They are best recallable when the mind, heart, motives, and opportunities are aligned, to enable an individual who is ready to pursue and change her life from a state of intra-personal and inter personal conflict to self-reconciliation or from conflict to a state of peace. The fact that these recallable lessons were faith based, bolsters

previous research claims that spirituality and religious coping should not be discounted in any analysis of holistic healing when Aboriginal women survivors of violence is the focus.

Additionally, in Avena's story she engaged the religious problem solving approach of "self-directing" as discussed in Pargament (2007:1988), Taylor (2010) and Wang's (2007) research. It became the result of her efforts (get counselling, learning about her parental legal rights, etc.) in a round-about way. Overall her story presented itself similarly to the above author's (Taylor 2010 and Wang's 2007) contention that women who factor religion and or spirituality in their intimate partner relationship have the potential to both experience positive and negative outcomes when IPV or DV are present.

Tiawan's story illustrated similar realities as those identified by chapter two authors. Her story poignantly outlined the detrimental impact that some interpretations of Christianity (as was taught in residential schools) can have on an Aboriginal woman seeking to escape DV. For Tiawan, her experience with fear based teachings about Christianity and little reassuring lessons about a Creator that values and cares for her wellbeing contributed to her tolerance of DV. Also, it left her feeling and believing that Christianity based internal value system was inadequate in preparing her for the life challenges she faced.

The point of departure her story reveals from the stories discussed in chapter two, is that regardless of where an individual learned or acquired her value system they shape her worldview. So, it can be said that an individual's worldview must be self-affirming. Furthermore, any value system that does not teach a woman that she is worthwhile will create resentment or become a relic of her past. Teachings whether from Christianity or First Nations

spirituality must outline the significance the adherent has in the broader context of life. This must be clear and constantly affirmed as the adherent passes through various life experiences.

In Levene's story, what blatantly stood out in relation to the stories of chapter two, is the connection between her deep love for her daughter and the powerful influence it had on her opening up to learning from both the good and bad experiences. Her story also reveals that it is almost impossible to achieve change in one's life without a community of personal support. Even if a woman has the strongest convictions without a positive support base, life's challenges can weight down or defeat her attempts.

In all the research presented in chapter two, it was clear that good supportive networks were vital to the success of DV survivors. Regardless if these support systems were religious groups or family or friends or kind strangers, women's successes were more likely within a context of healthy, affirming support systems. None of chapter two stories were without this. Thus, Levene's story serves as a significant reminder that healthy, support groups regardless of types (religious, cultural, etc.) are essential in the healing journey for women survivors of DV.

Furthermore, in the pursuit of self-reconciliation it is imperative to stay the course, and not return to the site of violence too soon. To return too soon could render the progress of acquiring inner peace incomplete or partial. Moreover, a woman returning too soon to the site of violence could jeopardize her receiving all the opportunities of blessings that could present themselves while she is being reoriented toward peace at the healing place.

What Rezara's story illustrated best in relation to the stories of chapter two is that having a particular faith (Christian or otherwise) does not necessarily prepare a woman to successfully survive conflicts in her life, with or without DV. Learning how to navigate through the most

practical aspects of faith teachings can be the best asset to a woman's survival, conflict or not. This requires a woman's active participation to engage her sets of beliefs, values, rituals (prayers, meditation, acquiring more teachings, etc.) and includes some element of the unpredictable workings of a transcendent power. This could also be referred to as relying on the spiritual sources of her strength. Rezara's story also attests that persistence in positive thinking, prayer and working with appropriate professionals produces results.

Rezara's story revealed that while one's faith does not guarantee a life without trials, it can certainly be a collaborative tool to use while facing challenges. In a sense, the spiritual force Rezara believed in and relied on became a protection that preserved her through the process of conflict. Faith based teaches does not necessarily eliminate conflict but it can preserve or provide some protection for one's spirit. In this instance, Rezara believes that both God and her faith in Him made a positive difference in her moving from a context of violence toward an interior and literal space of peace.

5.5 Meaning Making—contribution to knowledge

In terms of contribution to knowledge, and creating tools that women can use, through the GT emergent categories of analysis (environment, obstacles, means, interests, objectives, opportunities, and readiness) it has been illustrated that intra personal or self-reconciliation is possible. The four stories reveal how this transpires. What this means for other women who want to find their way out of DV, is that they can find approaches from their own experiences to enable them in the process of self-reconciliation. However, there is no one prescription that fits for everyone.

Though the way is not prescribed, there is an essential element needed; Greenberg (1979) suggest that it is present readiness for change that leads to reconciliation. This research corroborates the point and using the four participant's stories further suggests how readiness actually works. First, there needs to be a cognitive and emotional recognition that the relationship is over; a deep desire must emerge to create a violence-free context, to take control of one's own life, a wiliness to stand alone if need be, forgive one's self and other and commitment to the process of change. Seek out information that helps one to achieve the desire. This process works iteratively to enable intra-personal self-reconciliation from violent contexts.

At the initial starting point, women can assess and draw from what they already have or realize what they don't already have. Next, they can use their own judgement and reflection, to do an internal check—an emotional excavation for their resources (spiritual, religious, non-spiritual/religious and intuitive). This is important because it serves as a guide for her into the right help seeking direction (either from professional counseling, trusted friend, personal, experiential or self-directed learning).

Second, once the resources are deemed present or lacking, she can begin to pursue then acquire new knowledge. Bear in mind that doing the emotional excavation will reveal two distinct categories (already have & don't already have), they can also overlap. An overlap can exist in relation to dormant resources; possibly because the individual does not know how to operationalize them or in the past were operationalizing them inappropriately. Then, recognizing their utility can become apparent in the search for what one assumes she does not already have.

The search for something new can take the form of learning about new concepts, teachings, world views, skills development or a contemporary adaptation of anyone or all of the

above. The next step is the validation process, wherein the individual dwells with the new knowledge (or new adaptation of something they already have). In this step, the individual either immediately begins to actualize change (in thoughts or actions) or allow it to occur over a period of time. During this phase what ultimately determines the role the new knowledge plays is the confidence (affirmation/value) the individual acquires as a result of its presence and that she understands and believes in the process taking place.

Third, a creative synthesis begins to develop, wherein the individual starts to integrate what she already has with her new knowledge. The outcome of this is usually a new approach to addressing conflict or general issues in her life. This new approach also requires a new environment or context to safely apply them in.

Additionally, at the opportune time if the individual chooses to return to the previous site (community, place, person who committed the act) of violence, the knowledge acquired about how to achieve and maintain safety can also add an additional dimension to the healing journey. This is important because in every environment one needs to be aware of how to be safe and where to seek refuge should safety be compromised. This new dimension usually surfaces as agency which can affect change in other people's lives as well.

Diagram 5.6.1 depicts the research's contribution to knowledge:

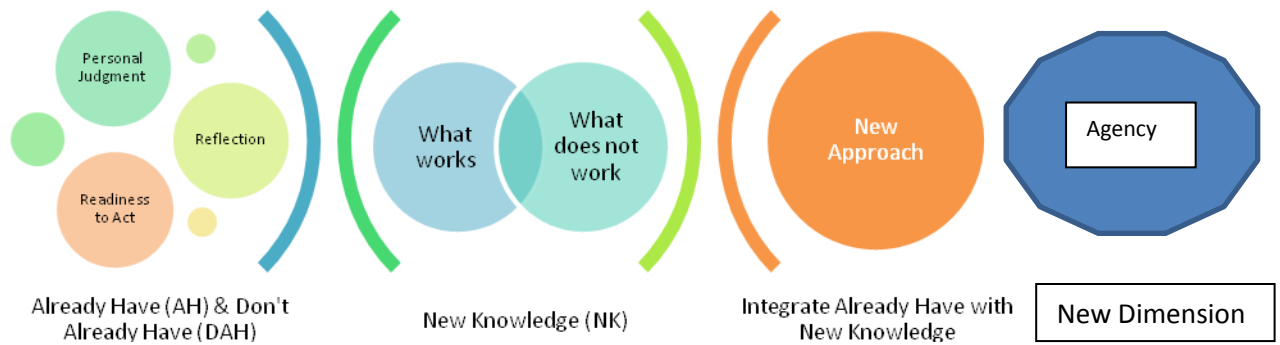


Diagram 5.6.1

5.6 Summary

The approach all four women adopted in their pursuit of intra-personal reconciliation was unique. They all left the conflict for different as well as similar reasons. They all found hope, encouragement and the impetus to continue on their personal journey after leaving their Reserve community for Sioux Lookout. The research indicates that a by-product of persevering and surviving DV has been finding a greater life purpose. At the end of the interviews, the concomitant meaning participants acquired is that life can become empowered by a new attitude that is built on the drive to survive, faith teachings and a healthy support system. With a new outlook plans to embark on ventures that will uplift themselves, family and community are on the horizon.

In essence, the meta-theory that emerged from the research process is that spirituality is at the core of all four participants' decision making process in their pursuit to be self-reconciled. However, notions of spirituality vary among the four women, and thus, their spirituality was shaped by the conflicts in their lives differently. Also, time was an important and central factor in how the conflict (DV) and their pursuit of reconciliation manifested.

The participants have looked to spirituality for various reasons. The research has revealed that some may garner strength by recalling childhood faith based teachings which can bring an individual full circle and be clearly transmitted to the next generation. For others, First Peoples spiritual teachings (Seven Grand Father Teachings) can appeal to an inner desire to leave behind previous inadequate teachings or miss understanding of teachings for more palatable expressions of love, tradition and freedom.

In addition, the inner drive (resiliency) to survive adversity can provide the impetus that shapes positive decisions. To be ones best supporter and listening to the inner voice can enable one to maintain strength to survive a conflict. An important caveat is remembering to identify an anchor that safe guard the inner voice on a source greater than one's own strength. Finally, others can allow their spirituality to mature in the presence of conflict, by refining faith based teachings (i.e. forgiveness) in a practical sense, with rituals such as prayer, bible reading and fellowshiping with similar believers.

These varied expressions of spirituality have shape the self-reconciliation approach the four women adopted. As they made their escape from violence and sought to redefine their identity from a victim status to a survivor outlook their path toward self-reconciliation also opened the door for some to be experiencing inner peace.

Accordingly, teachings can carry much weight whether they are taught from early childhood or acquired during or after experiencing life challenges. These teachings can affect individuals either adversely or positively as time goes by and conflict intervenes. As illustrated by the women's story, **time** and **conflicts** are difficult to control. As well, they are two aspects of life that are present in most environments. However the teachings a woman decides or determines to rely on when in conflict, can reveal if there are inconsistencies in her understanding of the utility of spirituality.

Nevertheless, the positive, healthy, productive thoughts and actions (agency/choice) of each participant should relate in an iterative sense with her spirituality. This can offer reminders that regardless of where teachings hail from or what roots they emerge out of (Christian faith teachings, First Nations Spiritual teachings, or inner resolve) once they are taught or acquired, teachings have a powerful reach. Conversely, bad teachings or no teachings can destabilize efforts to acquire self-reconciliation or inner peace. The hope worth mentioning here is that good teachings can enable one to assist in the process or reconciliation or the goal of self-reconciliation, all of which is essential to establishing inner peace.

The determining factor in how well an individual redefine her life context following the escape from violence is based on her effort to combine good teachings in her decision making process. Each individual choice is further shaped by how the universal categories (environment, obstacles, means, interest, opportunities, and objectives) are experienced. Whether or not the individual relying on these teachings fully comprehend them and view them as useful tools is important.

To view faith based or spiritual teachings as aid tools to be governed by individual responsibility and be used at will, cannot be understated. Using teachings in collaboration with a community of positive cheer leaders, and recognizing the interior emotional location one occupies on her personal healing journey (i.e. learning to forgive, letting go of pain, redefining the source of self-confidence, or becoming spiritual mature) can be a positive force to initiate the hope of inner peace. That being said, all things work together to protect and preserve the spirit of the individual as a defense mechanism. Whether the self-reconciliation process initiated is sustainable in all cases is a matter to be explored for another research.

5.7 Reflections- Illumination & Explication

‘On the meaning of new knowledge’

Pursuing Avena for over six months has endeared her to me in a way that I did not plan for. Pursuing her has taught me a valuable lesson in caring for others in absentia. What this meant in my spiritual life was that I prayed and often wished her well. As my thoughts drew me toward her, I would try to e-mail or call or just simply hope that all was working out for her. This research about spirituality and religious coping strategies of DV survivors opened me up not only to Avena’s world but also to my interior world.

Learning from Tiawan’s story was interesting. She taught me that there are perils to be avoided when using faith-based values as tools in conflict resolution. Particularly, it is important to learn of the early childhood points of entry wherein the notions of faith values were espoused, formed or absorbed. The act of unlearning and relearning spiritual teachings is an act of resistance and a tool to assist in the process of transformation necessary to survivals of conflicts.

Also, that both researcher and participants need to deeply assess the context that spiritual or religious values were transmitted in. Knowing whether they were taught in healthy,

loving, affirming environments or hostile, unpleasant ones has strong implications in the effectiveness of using faith based teachings to mitigate in the struggle against DV. Not being familiar with the place that these types of teachings hail from can add to the problem rather than mitigate it.

Also, Tiawan's story caused me to think deeply about why a person who was raised in a particular faith as a child/youth turns away from it in later years. Her story gave me a glimpse in to a particular reasoning. Perhaps people leave early life faith based teachings because they did not learn the true essence of the values. Additionally, they might leave it because the teachings did not connect on that internal, personal level.

Maybe, the lure (promise of true freedom, higher understanding) of other teachings win over the allegiance because it requires less commitment and offers more independence. For what it is worth, even leaving the teachings of one's youth for more grown up sophisticated interpretations of faith teachings, values or beliefs can still lead to an outcome that is either more fulfilling or less than desirable.

By doing this research, field work, transcribing the data, reading over the participant's words multiple times, thinking theoretically about what they have said, created wisdom, knowledge and gave me understanding. In doing this research, I

became changed in my approach as to how I seek out answers in challenging contexts.

This brings me back to a childhood request I had made with God. I used to pray and ask Him for wisdom, knowledge and understanding. The answer came unexpectedly, through learning by doing GT research on spirituality and religious based coping strategies. As well, the request was granted as I engaged in what I believe to be my life work, listening to (caring for) others through personal conflicts. This research has illustrated that I am to show others the path to intrapersonal reconciliation through love and caring that is engendered by facilitating and listening to their stories of what they have done and want to do with their lives.

Levene's story required the most effort and energy. It pushed me beyond all my comfort zones as I attempted to maintain our contact. At times it frustrated me. At other times a deep maternal instinct surfaced in my search attempts to find her and keep the lines of communication open. I had to look almost everywhere and asked almost everyone I thought would or could give me some information to connect with her. When I finally heard her voice, something deep in my heart was happy to know she was alive even if she was not keeping as well as she had hoped.

It was as if her wellbeing was connected to my own. Her story challenged me the most as I had to deeply search for the meaning of hers in relation to my spiritual journey. Then in a quiet moment, it occurred to me, that inner peace also comes to those seeking and caring for others as they engage in and practice unconditional love. In some cases, even if an individual does not acquire all the tools necessary to change a destructive path to a constructive one on the first attempt, just the opportunity to talk about or acquire some constructive lessons even for a short time it can still be of value.

From Rezara's story I also saw the two ways that faith based values and beliefs informing one's spirituality can enable or detract from a woman's healing journey. First, spirituality informed by an active faith can be a strong resiliency quality to work with to overcome conflicts.

It can also work against an individual if the values, principles, rituals or ceremonies are not clearly understood. Using partial understanding of faith based values to address complex issues does not produce positive outcomes. It frustrates the believer and causes her to doubt the power (source) behind what she believes.

Additionally, spirituality as a process of connecting with the higher power matures when one is constantly engaged in

thinking about and doing the things that will strengthen the internal bond between the Creator and oneself. This can eventually lead to peace in the life of the survivor of violence. As discussed earlier, reconciliation is experienced both internally and externally. Thus, internal reconciliation in a DV survivor's life can also impact others in the same sense. However, this does not mean that conflicts will not arise during the process of pursuing peace.

Consequently, it occurred to me that perhaps the desire for peace would not exist in anyone's life if it were not for the existence of some level of conflict. To have been exposed to the four women's stories, has confirmed in my spiritual life that nothing other than a healthy growing relationship with the Creator can enable and sustain long lasting internal peace.

To engage the ritual of prayer and bible reading in the midst of a healthy fellowship with a positive support system has the most transformative power to enable perfecting peace. In this sense, perfecting peace is not a life without challenges or conflict, it is engaging with a real and dynamic transcendent, ineffable power that can reshape the negative circumstances to work out for one's good.

Chapter 6

6.0. Conclusion

The main intent of the research was to first garner and highlight how some Aboriginal women from a particular regional environment (north-western Ontario) have and are coping with their past experience of domestic violence (DV). Additionally, to understand the way in which they engaged their spirituality or religious beliefs (values or teachings) to derive life meaning, which also enables them to move toward particular types of reconciliation outside the context of violence. Using Redekop's (2002a) thirteen tenants of reconciliation, how the four individuals engaged the process of change was detailed. Thus, listening to their stories, charting it and allowing GT to elucidate categories/themes can direct meaningful analysis in research.

Unearthing the meaning of spirituality and religious beliefs from the viewpoint of some Aboriginal women survivors of DV is an important venture. It is of significance as the research reveals that their thoughts and action are affected by what they believe about their spirituality or religious teachings. Furthermore, providing an academic space to outline their journey with DV creates a wider audience they can share their experiences with, as well as provide cues for intervention in similar context to interested audiences.

It was deemed important to garner information about Aboriginal women from the north western Ontario region as preliminary research suggested that there was a gap in academia concerning how some individuals are coping with violence there. Moreover, the fieldwork suggest there is a need for regional service providers to see value in the sources Aboriginal women have defined to be most useful in aiding them along their healing journey.

Doing this research proved to be challenging for all involved as factors such as time, life circumstances and geographical location or relocation had to be contend with. However,

excavating the treasure of knowledge, which until now was hidden from academic view in north-western Ontario, has offered new insights to addressing a long standing crisis.

Chapter one set out the parameters of the study. It situating the phenomenon of DV as it relates to Aboriginal women, it identified the terms of importance and located the standpoint of the researcher as an integrated part of learning by doing GT, Heuristic and Mimetic Structure of Blessing research. Chapter two displayed previous research and provided a wider context of themes to illustrate the intricate nuances on the subject matter of DV and Aboriginal women. Chapter three contextualized the role of theory in both creating meaning from the stories told by the women and seeing and charting the meaning they derived from their experiences. From a methodological perspective, employing a constructivist approach to Grounded Theory (GT) enabled the researcher to glean more closely the true essence of the four participant's experiences. Using open, axial and selective coding enabled the knowledge from the categorized data to reveal seven universal themes and sixty one sub-themes. This made meaning visible and intelligible. In form, the research data process emerged from two one-on-one semi structured interviews over a period of six to eight months.

The use of a heuristic approach lends itself to an additional dimension of meaning making. It allowed the researcher (Self) to be present throughout the research, through an exercise in reflexivity in sections titled 'reflections'. While understanding emerges from the researcher's work on the phenomenon, she also experiences growth, self-awareness, and self-knowledge as the six main phases (initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis) of heuristic research were engaged.

Redekop's (2002a) conception of reconciliation and Mimetic Structures of Blessing served as the principle foundation for assessing how the women have pursued the healing journey they set out to accomplish. By examining the layers of relational systems at play in both the mapped DV& Intra personal reconciliation exercise (using a Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) tool), sight and insight were derived. Drawing from the 'good theory' of reconciliation the interior world of the participant's became visible.

In parallel to the search to comprehend how some Aboriginal women have utilize their spirituality or religious beliefs in their coping with DV, the researcher also experienced her own personal learning as her spirituality was engaged. Thus, doing research about spirituality in marginalized women's lives has the potential to impact the spirituality of the researcher, particularly if she identifies herself from a marginalized group.

In chapter four, the real life stories of four courageous women were presented. Herein, the focus was on identifying their actions, events, thinking, emotions and to creatively interpret them. By using a creative Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment diagram to first illustrate (map) patterns of interaction between the seven categories, meaning began to take a particular shape. This also mapped the varied ways women actualized intra-personal reconciliation. Consequently, four approaches to Self reconciliation emerged and produced four particular understanding. The stories illustrated that while merit exists in an individual becoming acquainted with one's own spirituality or religious beliefs, the outcome of doing so depends on which faith based coping strategies are employed– differing, collaborative and self-directing, to engage coping (as defined by Pargament, et al. 1988, 91-92; Wang, 2007, 8). Furthermore, First Nations spiritual practices (Sweat Lodge, smudging ceremony, drumming circle, pow-wow) or religious practices adhere to (prayer, Bible reading, fellowshiping) can aid one in the effort to

mitigate conflict. The potential result that emerges along-side this approach to conflict reduction or eradication is both an internal and external (personal and spiritual) transformation.

Chapter five used the good theory of Mimetic Structures of Blessing to unearth how meaning can be derived for individuals in conflicts with self or other. Meaning is juxtaposed by using previous research on the context of DV with the present research. Furthermore, it critically engages the thirteen tenants of reconciliation for this same goal. What resulted from this process are four varied answers concerning how reconciliation is operationalized using spirituality and or religious beliefs. Herein, the contribution to knowledge is the awareness of an additional element 'readiness', as essential to the development of Self-reconciliation.

Furthermore, the meta-theory that surfaced is that during conflict, some women make an assessment of what they already or don't already have in terms of teachings; then seek to acquire new knowledge that impacts their thinking process and actions. Integrating knowledge already have with new notions, enables one to begin the process of healing. Along this healing journey, their capacity for agency also develops and they begin to visualize avenues to positively impact change in other people lives.

6.1 Limitations of Research

As stated in the title this is research centers on a particular group of women from a particular region and how they have in fact survived and are pursuing their desire to be reconciled internally (find inner peace). Thus, the results are limited to a small portion of an isolated region of Canada and do not apply to First Nations women in general. However, in a broad sense, the theoretical work through GT and Heuristic methods did provide a critical

assessment of the journey of the four research participants. The research elicited from their stories the critical elements that made a difference in their lives.

Regarding generalizability, what is significant is that all of these self-selected to be a part of the study. There is something about this that sets them apart. They all were making progress in confronting DV—they were all regaining a capacity for agency. Therefore, nothing in what is told of their stories is unique to Sioux Lookout, in terms of DV. What is unique is that Sioux Lookout is a beacon of hope by providing enough distance from their reserves to make a fresh start; it has a variety of resources that are diverse enough to accommodate Secular, traditional and Christian-based healing journeys. As well as, its physical environment is lush with trees, surrounded by lakes, a mountain, hills and valleys. The environmental feature of the region seems to speak to the ineffable part of one's soul and provides added value in any journey towards healing. The fact that all participants passed through Sioux Lookout raises the question of whether women from other reserves across the country have access to something similar.

Employing GT, Heuristic, Mimetic Structure of Blessing approaches to research serves the purpose of preserving an 'organic' element for a more flexible, robust process of inquiring that aims to capture and honor the knowledge human experiences can and do generate.

6.2 Recommendations— avenues for future research

A possible avenue for future research regarding this topic would be to identify the ways in which faith strengthens Aboriginal women to become leaders within their communities. This would be useful as many of the women in the literature review and in three of the four participants stories have set out to better themselves and give back to their immediate family, this also includes the reserve. Another avenue for knowledge production would be to identify the extent to which First Nation's women's faith or spiritual teachings enable them with the capacity and presence to pursue leadership roles in their community. This could outline how gender and spirituality or gendered spiritual identity does or does not work together to mitigate violence structurally or culturally.

History and individual stories has revealed that due to the onslaught of cultural, religious, political and economic colonization by the Euro-Canadian state, Aboriginal peoples have had to engineer creative ways to mitigate the violence assailed against them. Perhaps research that focuses on assessing the role spirituality can play as an act of resistance— that women employ against DV or any other violent conflict would further broaden the scope of spirituality as a tool that can enable change.

Other dynamic methodological considerations such as Indigenous methodologies, Native liberation theology, ecological theory, feminist epistemology, hermeneutic phenomenological approaches to research were considered for this research. However, they did not fit ideally into the final approaches adapted to theory. Yet, they could still be considered as future methodological sites to further garner insight on the subject matter of marginalized women, spirituality; religious based coping strategies, domestic violence and intra-personal reconciliation.

6.3 Reflections – Creative Synthesis

I believe that reconciliation is a dynamic process. I echo Redekop's point that the dynamic thing about reconciliation is that as it happens internally it is also seen externally. That being said, reconciliation as a process or a goal is closely connected to teachings. Although in theory, this interior transformation can be seen externally, I believe that untrained eyes are not capable of seeing the transformation in the light it is meant to be best viewed.

Redekop posits that he shared with psychotherapists, pastoral counsellors and other professionals in the helping field to be "agent[s] of reconciliation and healing to people and relationships wounded through deep-rooted conflict" (2001, 10).

Likewise, this project proved to be a sort of coming out into this same helping area for me. This research has poignantly served as a teaching tool in both a theoretical and practical sense. This research process serves as a training of my eyes, heart, thoughts and actions per se, to better perceive how some women pursue internal reconciliation.

Reconciliation from the perspective of healing the inner space, soul, spirit, and thought life of an individual wounded by adversities or conflicts is a gift that the participants gave

me when they decided to share their stories. This research is most illustrative of this view.

It also brought me into close proximity with the issues as seen by the participants and by the academic community that has already written extensively on the phenomenon of DV or IPV and Aboriginal women. Without these two avenues of knowledge production (field work and previous literature) I would not have been informed.

As a result of this learning process, two significant things emerged for me. First, from a spiritual perspective, this education process has strengthened my own sense of spirituality as doing grounded theory (GT) and heuristic research illuminated aspects of the road to developing a strong notion of the 'ethics of care'.

Moreover, it is because the theory of Mimetic Structures of Blessing has woven within its core the 'ethics of care' it proved to be most useful in the analysis to generate insight for me. It appears that I can understand theory better when I can personally relate to it. The crux of the matter in Mimetic Structures of Blessing is that within relational systems which uplift and enable charity and the mutual desire for the Other's wellbeing, lays the power to initiate positive change. This holds true to life. Perhaps, had I not experienced this for

myself, I would have a hard time believing it. However, I experienced it for myself and now know it to be true. Experiencing the internal pull towards the four participants inspite of the numerous challenges that emerged has enabled me to theoretically 'see' what I did not before. Blessings (strength, hope, charity, patience, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding) can be derived from almost any of the conflicts we experience in life.

Second, this research has enabled me to solidify my own understanding of my personal lifework. Doing research that constantly pushes me into new territories and expanded my notions of boundaries (cultural, spiritual and social) was in some ways a liberating act. As a result, I connected with my heart on a deeper level and was able to access meaning and purpose. Also, I found concrete assurance of the professional direction my life should take.

This also reconnected me with my Jamaican roots concerning community. Growing up in rural Jamaica, most people survived in every sense of the word because of the strong, positive social support network of family and friends. Moving to Canada in my early teenage years and adopting the North American (individualistic) world view had boxed me in to a strange, distant place. Engaging in this research process has

reconnected me to my unique, Jamaican, open, flexible way of thinking and being that is essential for working with First Peoples in any meaningful way.

Thus, this GT, Heuristic and Structure of Blessing research process has solidified the notion that a healthy and supportive community is vital to spiritual growth and vice a versa for participants (socio familial) and researcher (academic support) alike.

In the life of this project, the trajectory of time (2007-2012) has revealed that listening to and learning from First Nations female victims of DV to survivors stories, can provide meaningful knowledge in multiple ways. In addition, learning how to analyze intra personal conflicts from a religious beliefs or spirituality lens does not only require a critical but rather a sympathetic or familiar gaze.

The poem below came to mind as I wrapped my thoughts around the notion that my learning through doing MA research was drawing to a close. This poem is a creative synthesis of my MA field work. This is the way in which I chose to see (poem & picture) and understand the cross fertilization learning process that has transpired between me learning about the experiences of the four participants' and my very own.

6.3.1 Poem

Not being Critical but Analytical of the Spiritual

How can I reach into your soul room and learn from your pain?
How can I hear your story and comprehend your truth?
How can I learn about your past and refrain from judgement?
It all stems from me not being critical but instead analytical of the spiritual.

It has taken many years to arrive at this place,
Me now meeting you and living in your Sioux Lookout space.
What I have discovered is that even though we hail from geographically different places,
Wear different faces, or speak a varied of tongues, we still hold a common bond.
We may be marginalized in some people eyes, but are still sisters, daughters, mothers, partners
and wives.
Our families, friends and a deep love for the Creator keep us grounded, free and alive.
Some have not understood this rich history. But I am grateful the Creator has enabled me to see
as the Creator does, that all paths to peace are varied.

Yet, our spirituality keeps us connected.

We've been linked through the power that is beyond Academic or life's tragic highs or lows.
Why am I so confident of this?

My experiences confirm that I know what I know.

Yes, the reasons I can listen, hear, and understand where you hail from and chose to get beyond

I too am a traveler on a road toward self-reconciliation.

6.3.2 Picture

A road toward self-reconciliation



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Notes

¹Kirlew, Yolaine 2007, explored this topic in a research paper title *Religion, identity and gender: an exploratory analysis on the utility of religion within the context of violence against Women*.

² This expression has been adopted from a class discussions, but it is cited in the reading *Moving beyond culturally bound ethical Guidelines* by Goulet, Jean-Guy A, who cited Schutz & Luckmann (1973, 3) to mean it is the world taken for granted that adults draw meaning from their experiences.

³ By using this term, I am making reference to Spiro's (1987a, 163-165) in Goulet (2007, 226) definition which "defines a belief as a proposition or a statement that is held to be true by the members of a society. The proposition may be about oneself or about other entities, whatever they may happen to be, fellow human beings, God, spirit, atoms, or germs, In other words to hold a proposition as true is to believe. Beliefs held to be true may belong to any realm of experience; science, politics, economy, religion, or another body of theoretical and/or practical knowledge."

⁴ Ellens has generously spoken to this point in a non-gendered sense in Ellens, Harold. 2004. *The destructive power of religion: violence in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. Westport, Conn: Praeger. He outlined that religion as a source of consolation and hope accounts for ones endurance throughout history. It also activates and propels spirituality in terms of humanity's search for meaning. Religion also can inform our worldview, rituals, and the areas we seek assistance and make connections with others and with God.

⁵See other works by Pargament (1997); Weaver, A., Pargament, K.I., Flannelly, K.I., and Oppenheimer, J.E. (2006); Tepper, L., Rogers, S. A., Coleman, E.M., & Malony, H.N. (2001).

⁶ The notion that research can be an instrument of change for researcher and participant's alike was elaborated on by Cree author Wilson, in Wilson, Shawn. 2008. *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing. (108)

⁷ Herein this seeks to underscore research subjects as "data to be account for" (p. 424). Mauthner, Natasha & Doucet, Andrea. 2003. Reflexive accounts and accounts of reflexivity in qualitative data Analysis. *Sociology* 37, no. 3:413-431

⁸ Ibid., 413, therein they have outlined eight ranges of reflexivity—the personal, interpersonal, institutional, pragmatic, emotional, theoretical, epistemological and ontological. They did not identify the spiritual range which this research focuses.

⁹ This is taken from the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority Administrative Manual, under the section titled "history of the area". It was created/presented by Barbara Friesen (1993, 1).

¹⁰This statistical reference is taken from (1999) Aboriginal Census Data in Canada: A Research Note. *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* XIX, 2: 365-379, cf. 367.

¹¹<http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-558/p15-eng.cfm> (accessed January 26, 2011)

¹²<http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-558/p16-eng.cfm> (accessed January 26, 2011)

¹³<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-pr-eng.cfm?Lang=Eng&GK=PR&GC=35> (accessed on March 1, 2012).

¹⁴The Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series. (2003). *Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada* in Part I: *Toward Understanding the Problem*, 26.

¹⁵Friesen, 1993, from the section titled "Mission Statement" (n. p. #).

¹⁶Ibid., extrapolated from the section titled "The spiritual beliefs of the Zone Area" (n. p. #).

¹⁷ Mauthner & Doucet 2003 has called for "researchers to be self-conscious about and articulate their role in [the] research process" (424). Engaging in this process situates my assumptions as they have termed it to be "partial, provisional and perspectival" (416). Thus, my assumptions are not projected claims upon the research, they reflect my thinking about the topic as I have experienced.

¹⁸ Sohpie Tamas work speaks to the power of sharing stories. *Play the survivor: how (and if) women recover from spousal abuse*. Ph.D. diss., Carleton University (Canada), 2010.
<http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/613725551/fulltextPDF/136E8D7C245E3349D3/4?accountid=14701> (accessed May 23, 2012)

¹⁹ This speaks to two notions author's Mauthner & Doucet 2003 put forth, that researchers in their reflexivity agenda should indicate how they perceive their subjects, as data to be accounted for, discovered or constructed. Also, that "as social researchers we [recognize that we] are integral to the social world we study" (Ibid., 424).

²⁰ This point was made by authors Dew Rachel, Daniel Stephanie, Goldston David & Harold Koenig. 2008. Religion, spirituality, and depression in adolescent psychiatric Outpatients. *The Journal of Nerves and Mental Disease* 196, no. 3: 247 Also, additional literature review on the subject matter consistently acknowledges this claim.

²¹ The meaning of Spirituality was interestingly defined. In a unique way the authors approached their explanation from a “maximal inclusiveness perspective” (219) that also intertwined the meaning of religion. Their rationale for doing so was that although the two terms are not entirely interchangeable, they do have overlapping meanings. Furthermore both terms factor into an individual’s cultural and racial identity, which ultimately informs the persons’ world view. Hage, M. Sally, Hopson, Amy, Siegel, Matthew, Payton, Gregory and Defanti, Elizabeth. 2006. Multicultural training in spirituality: an interdisciplinary Review” in *Counseling and Values*, 50, no. 3: 217-234. <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&hid=10&sid=d193da79-0bd7-424a-966f-f8e7d97209d8%40sessionmgr12> (accessed March 25, 2011)

²² This definition was very succinct and useful from Smith, D. & Orlinsky, D. 2004. Religious and spiritual experience among Psychotherapists in *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 4 no. 2: 145-151.

²³ Ibid., 144

²⁴ Another great article on the subject matter is presented by, Burkhardt, A. Margaret. 1989. Spirituality: an analysis of the concept in *Holistic Nursing Practice* 3, no. 3: 69-77. Her views on spirituality as a concept was similar to Smith & Orlinsky’s contention that spirituality is expressed through various beliefs and practices that are both religious and non-religious.

²⁵ This quote is taken from Yasmin, Jiwani’s. (2007, 25) in “Culture, Violence and Inequality- The FREDA [Feminist Research Education Development and Action Centre] Centre for research on Violence against Women and Children. Keynote Speech at the March 1997 Workshop: Violence against women: meeting the cross-cultural Challenge”. She provided a useful frame work for contextualizing the term. However, the research recognizes there are First Nations scholars such as Patricia Monture-Angus (1995) who have challenged the inherent utility of any construct of patriarchy. Monture-Angus has argued that the concept of patriarchy alone is inadequate to explicate the various levels of violence Aboriginal women face within their communities.

²⁶ Redekop highlighted this point in our April 30th 2012, MA thesis meeting.

²⁷ They provided a simple foundation to build from on the meaning of reconciliation in the context of Aboriginal Canadian experiences with residential Schools; Castellano, M. B., Archibald, L., DeGagne, M. (2008). *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

²⁸ Robert J. Schreiter’s (2002) presented the notion of reconciliation symbolically as having two faces in his book, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality & Strategies*. New York: Orbis Books. He also indicated that on a broad world scale, the practice of reconciliation “remains an elusive spiritual practice” (4).

²⁹ Building from a Catholic doctrinal tradition, he provides an interesting outline of the context and principles for reconciliation. His argument is hinged on the point of Jesus as the agent of reconciliation between all creation and God. Therefore, a Christian life should dictate that all Christians become agents of reconciliation. Morneau F. Robert. 2007. *Reconciliation*. New York: RCL Benziger, Orbis Books.

³⁰ This information was taken from

<http://www.acws.ca/documents/ViolenceagainstWomenandGirlsFactSheet2003.pdf> - (accessed September 30, 2010).

³¹ This was taken from the fact sheet on “Violence Against Women and Children”-

<http://elizabethfry.ca/wwdcms/uploads/Violence%20Against%20Women%20and%20Children.pdf> - (accessed July 8, 2012).

³² Although I realize that other standpoint feminist would disagree with my assertion. Mcorkel A. Jill and Myers, Kristen. 2003. What difference does difference make?: position and privilege in the Field. *Qualitative Sociology*. 26, no. 2:199-231. They “argue that this influence becomes problematic when researchers occupying privileged positions in society elect to study those who are marginalized on the basis of race, class, and gender” (199).

³³ I came up with the term ‘a revolution for change’ to mark my personal about-face orientation towards acquiring internal peace and helping others. I then later read about something similar, ‘creative intentionality’ as put forth by Howard Clinebell, which resonates with my phrase. In his (1995, 31) book titled *Counseling for spiritually empowered wholeness; a hope-centered Approach*, he discussed the notion of “creative intentionality” as, in order to maximize personal growth to impact others there needs to be a combination effect through continuing decisions, action and self-discipline in the present that impacts the future.

³⁴ In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus presented this revolutionary approach in “The Beatitudes” to living a meaningful life in Him and in our relationship with humanity. I referenced the King James Bible.

³⁵For more on the subject of the ‘outsider within social location’, see Patricia Hill Collins (2000) book *The politics of Black Feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of Empowerment*. In chapter one, she discusses this peculiar vantage point from numerous context.

³⁶ Pages 4-8 illustrate the big picture on the subject matter in Trainor, Catherine, Lambert, Mylene, Dauvergne, Mia. 2002. Family violence in Canada: a statistical Profile 2002. *Ministry of Industry: Statistics Canada- Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics*. Catalogue no. 85-224-XIE:1-55

³⁷ Alternatively to these three approaches, Abelson (1959), would identify these four modes of resolution *denial, bolstering, differentiation and transcendence* individuals might turn to.

³⁸ This article speaks to the universality of the notion of spirituality as an integral aspect of positive adaptation and meaning making for some, in face of life challenges. See Greeff, P. Abraham and Loubser, Karla. 2007. *Journal of Religious Health* 47: 288-301.

³⁹ According to Mason (1996) active reflexivity in qualitative research “means that the researcher constantly take stock of their actions and role in the research process, and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their data” (6).

⁴⁰ Mason (1996) posits that the term descriptive provides an “explanatory account of what is going on in a particular social location, or of the operation of a s set of social processes” (137) and comparative “will aim to draw some explanatory significance from a specified set of comparisons” (137).

⁴¹ For more information of these authors approach see the book titled, *Developing Grounded theory: the second Generation*. Left Coast Press Inc.: California.

⁴² In Corbin, Juliet & Strauss, Anسلم. 1990. Grounded theory research: procedures, canons, and evaluation Criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13 no. 1:3-21.

⁴³ According to Redekop, a “relational system means that for a variety of reasons people are brought into contact with one another-they consider themselves in a similar place either geographically or figuratively. The relational system is made up of a context and people within that context” (2002a, 180-181). Furthermore, “a relational system could be internal to an individual. It may include two people in ongoing contact with one another or it could include groups. One relational system might involve two large groups; each group could have within it a number of relational subsystems” (ibid., 181).

⁴⁴ In Redekop’s (2002a) book *From Violence to Blessings* he defines this process according to Girard’s conception. His use of this word reflects best the “added quality of copying interiority”. Thus, “... mimesis also includes copy what is interior and observable only through its effects” (65).

⁴⁵ I am using this recently popular food term organic to describe a process of knowledge making that is derived from as much as possible the ‘simple, natural, unforced, un filtered, or whole experiences of the participants.

⁴⁶ Mauthner and Doucet 2003, put forth this argument on (414). Furthermore, they highlighted Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000, point that “methods of data analysis are not simple neutral techniques because they carry the epistemological, ontological and theoretical assumptions of the researchers who developed them” (415).

⁴⁷ Although Goulet, J.G. 1998. *Ways of knowing: experience, knowledge and power among the Dene Tha*. UBC Press: Vancouver, was speaking from an Anthropological perspective, his thoughts were insightful. Chapter ten-titled *An experiential approach to knowledge* – the notion that “knowledge is “a form of worldly immanence, a being-with-others, an understanding”(Jackson 1986, 164)” on (254) resonated with the herein research approach to initiate research that seeks to capture the essence of human lived experience, as well as, engage the ethics of reflexivity.

⁴⁸ There are many Native Canadian scholars whose work has informed this research process. Such as Kovach, Margret, et al. (2009); Smith (1999); Mihesuah, & Wilson (2004); Alfred (2005); Monture-Angus (1995) all speak to the challenges and rewards of being Aboriginal scholars in academia.

⁴⁹ As outlined in Kovach, Margret. 2009. *Indigenous methodologies characters, conversations and contexts*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

⁴⁶ Bob is a fictive name used as I did not acquire permission from him to include his name in the research. This in no ways underscore the significant role he played in connecting me to community stakeholder’s in Sioux Lookout. I am truly grateful for his efforts.

⁵¹ Mauthner and Doucet 2003, 424 indicated that researchers in the effort to be reflexive need to be clear in how they perceive their subjects [participants’] at every phase of the research process, including the data analysis and interpretation stages.

⁵² Friesen (1993, n. p. #), extrapolated from the same manual highlighted at endnote #6. However, not all the document was numbered. The section this information derived from was titled “history of the area”.

⁵³ According to Gall, Meredith, Gall, Joyce, Borg, Walter. 2007. Educational research: an introduction. 8th ed. Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon. Researchers dissimilarities with their research population sample can expose the participants to risk because of lack of knowledge about their particular vulnerabilities.

⁵⁴ Kenneth Bush (1998) wrote “A measure of peace: peace and conflict impact assessment of development projects in war zones” were in the Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) tool was established to “monitor & assess the broader peace and conflict impact” of development agencies intervention projects in conflict zones. Although Bush states he did not intend to use his work in “A measure of peace: peace and conflict impact assessment of development projects in war zones” as a full-blown kitbag of PCIA tools (2003, 38). It has assumed the role. His commons were taken from Bush (2003; 2001) “PCIA Five Years ON: the commodification of an idea” in Berghof Research Center publication. –http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/dialogue1_bush.pdf . (accessed April 28, 2009)

Furthermore, in 2004, then MA candidate Janet McGrath created an adaptation of Bush’s PCIA model to better reflect an indigenous approach. She called it “Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA): towards an adapted model for Indigenous-State relations in Canada”. In 2008, the researcher employed McGrath’s adaptation to assess a northern community suicide intervention program. Similar to Bush (1998) approach, the initial step in her adaptation encourages one to assess the environment of conflict through mapping; an exercise that seeks to outline the group or individual’s most known interest, objectives, means, obstacles and opportunities. The GT data was voluminous and needed to be organized to reflect the inherent patterns. In a second round of coding, Bush (1998) & McGraths (2004) five categories of PCIA came to mind. In the spirit of its intended purpose, PCIA was created to be an “expansion not a limitation” in “an organic southern-led learning process” (2003, 39), I followed the GT data’s impulse and added one additional category, ‘environment’. Later, in an interview with Supervisor Redekop, an additional category ‘Readiness’ surfaced. Following a third round of coding, readiness was incorporated as the seventh category. By adopting a PCIA exercise (mapping) in this context the researcher is able to maintain the spirit of PCIA, to “enter into an open-ended and on-going conversation”, by being flexible and creative with the tool (ibid. 39). Furthermore, she chose to use an approach created for this express purpose of addressing GT data on indigenous issues which in the process ‘give shape to the shapeless’ Manen (1990, 88).

⁵⁵ This Aboriginal philosophy was first introduced to the researcher in 2010 while she attended an Indigenous conference in Ottawa put on by the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health. There, she attended a workshop put on by KiiKeeWanNiiKaan Healing Lodge & Learning Centre. They spoke about the seven grand-father teachings and provided attendee’s access to their *Supporting your journey: an after care Handbook*. This later became the source quoted on the subject matter of how one Sweat Lodge has interpreted the teachings. no date .

⁵⁶ Redekop (2002a, 277) speaks to this notion as a central component in the life-oriented nature of mimetic structure of blessing.

Appendix A

Research Recruitment Letter

Yolaine Grant
Unit 1017-27 Auriga Drive
Ottawa, Ontario.
K2E 0R2, Canada

Dear Interested Participant:

My name is Yolaine Grant, and I attend Saint Paul University in Ottawa, Ontario, where I am working towards a Master's degree in Peace & Conflict Studies. I am under the supervision of Professor Vern Neufeld Redekop, PhD. I seek to embark on a research initiative that would examine if spirituality and or religious beliefs factor into the coping strategies of First Nations women who have experienced domestic violence before 2008.

The goal of the research is to engage some First Nations women views on themes, such as spirituality or religious beliefs, domestic violence, gender and identity. The intention is to have a dialogue between February to April 2010 on who they consider themselves to be and how the conflict situation (s) they have experienced shaped their lives.

This researcher is interested in interviewing once in two different months, eight (8) females who are First Nations, over the age of 18 years and who have experienced domestic violence prior to 2008 and not currently in such a situation. To establish whether this study would be a fit for the participant and meet the research interests, there are a few general questions that need to be asked. For example, are you a Band member of a First Nations community? Where do you currently reside? Will you be in Sioux Lookout anytime during February to April 2010 for at least one week? Do you have access to Tele Health in your community? Do you think you would be available for a follow-up Tele Health meeting?

As a volunteer you can feel rewarded many times over for educating the wider academic community with the unique insight of "your voice" on how you cope with conflict. Also, your experiences can enlighten the larger society on what lies behind your coping strategy when domestic conflict emerges. This makes a difference because your story needs to be heard to increase understanding.

Please call me today at 613-447-7430 and find out more about how you can participate, or send an email to Yolainethesisproject@hotmail.com
I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you, Meegwetch!

Yolaine Grant B.A., B.A. Hons. Master of Arts in Conflict Studies (Candidate)

Appendix B

Research Consent Form

Introduction:

This qualitative “interview” research study is being conducted by Yolaine Grant, MA student at Saint Paul University, under the supervision of Vern Redekop, PhD. The study wishes to determine whether the religious identity of First Nation women in Sioux Lookout Zone district shapes their coping strategies when dealing with domestic violence (DV).

Procedures:

If you are a female, First Nations, 18 years and older, who has experienced DV before 2008 and not currently in such a situation, you are being asked to participate in one primary one-on-one and one secondary follow-up interview. The primary interview is a semi structured interview that is to be maximum one and half hours in length. It will occur between February-April 2010.

The secondary, follow-up interview is also semi structured and its length ranges from thirty minutes to one and half hours. This is to take place one month following the first interview. The questions to be posed are to garner details about where you reside and your personal views and feelings about your religious identity, your experiences of domestic violence before 2008 and coping strategies. Due to the small pool of participants needed to undertake the study, not all individuals who agree to participate will be chosen.

All audio data collected in the interviews are voice recorded (via laptop & mini microphone) onto CDs for transcription purposes; and they will be turned over to the supervisor for safe keeping for a period of five years. Only those directly involved (researcher, research assistant/transcriber & research supervisor) will have access to them. The CD's will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the research.

Risks/Discomforts

I am aware that there are no physical risks associated with my participation in this study. However, in the event that I experience some emotional discomfort when answering questions about my personal beliefs, I will have the support of a Nodin counsellor.

Benefits

I am aware that there is no financial compensation for my participation. However, I realize that participating in this study can afford the opportunity to discuss my opinions on religion, identity, gender and domestic violence within the confines of a safe counselling establishment.

Furthermore, I realize that I am encouraged to discuss the beliefs that enable me to cope in difficult experiences, particularly, the one or multiple episodes of domestic violence experienced

before 2008. I accept that this can potentially provide an opportunity to garner conflict resolution skills to manage intrapersonal reconciliation and potentially positively impact others in my family and community. I understand that through Nodin counselling services, I will be invited to participate in a workshop on the findings of the study, and also be offered the written report.

Participation

I acknowledge that my participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Therefore, I maintain the right to withdraw at any-time or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to my counselling care at Nodin, or community.

I am in agreement with the usage of pseudonyms as a measure to provide confidentiality. The usage of pseudonyms is applicable towards me, and my home town in all references (verbal or written documents). Further, as a protection of confidentiality, the staff at Nodin will not have access to any interview data before final report of findings.

However, I am aware that there will be limits to confidentiality while participating in this study. Particularly, as it pertains to me disclosing suicidal intentions or harm to others immediately (while in interview one) or in the future (in interview two).

Questions about the Research

For concerns regarding this study, I am aware that I contact the Supervisor of this study, Professor Vern Neufeld Redekop at 613-236-1393 x 2369, Vice Dean & Coordinator of Conflict Studies program, Professor Paul Rigby at 613-236-1393 x233 or Mrs. Ming Zhang, the Director of Research Services at 613-236-1393 x2312.

I have read and received a copy, or have had a copy read to me and therefore understood, the above consent form and desire of my own free will and volition to participate in this study.

I (participant) have read and understood the informed consent process and thereby give my verbal assent to be audio recorded in this interview by researcher (Yolaine Grant) that I may explicitly participate in this research project.

Signature:_____

Date:_____

Appendix C
Research Letter of Appreciation

Yolaine Grant

Unit 1017-27 Auriga Drive
Ottawa, Ontario.
K2E OR2, Canada

Dear Reader:

It is with sincerity I express to you my appreciation for your interest in assisting with this project.

The study is seeking only eight (8) First Nation female volunteers and this places limits on the number of individuals that can be accepted. Please keep in mind that the eight participants chosen will be based on a first to volunteer basis.

However, if you are not chosen to participate, for your time and generous consideration, I would offer to you and invitation to the presentation of the research findings to be held in Sioux Lookout.

Additionally, if you would like to receive a copy of the final study, please indicate by what means you would wish to receive it electronically (e-mail) or by regular mail (home address) and one will be forwarded.

I can be contacted by phone 613-447-7430, E-mail: Yolainethesisproject@hotmail.com or by postal mail Yolaine Grant Unit 1017-27 Auriga Drive Ottawa, Ontario K2E-OR2.

Thank You! Meegwetch!

Appendix D

Interview A: Research Questions

Research Question: What role do spirituality and or religion play in the coping strategies of First Nation women who have experienced Domestic Violence?

Themes & possible general semi structured questions:

- ❖ The role of community in coping strategies...:
 1. *Describe for me your life in the community you reside in?*
- ❖ The role of family dynamics is creating an atmosphere of peace or conflict...:
 2. *Tell me about the things you do in your family ...*
- ❖ Establishing meaning based on grounds that could be informed by spirituality and/or religion...:
 3. *How do you give meaning to your everyday family life?*
- ❖ The role of gender based domestic violence (experiences before 2008) through meaning schema...:
 4. *How has domestic violence affected your outlook on life?*

Do keep in mind that the above questions are simply a guide for me to know how to make sense of the information the women will be providing. I will be spearheading the discussions mainly with themes, and from the response of the women draw on them (in session) for points of emphasis.

Interview B: Follow Up-Research Questions

- ❖ Examining post interview (A) the pursuit for intra psyche self-reconciliation...:
 5. *What has changed in your life since the last interview? How have your spiritual/religious believe and practices continue to play a role in your life?*

Appendix E

Research Recruitment Poster

How Do You Cope?

I am interested in what you have to say!

My name is Yolaine Kirlew and I am working on a research project to examine whether spirituality or religious beliefs factor into the coping strategies of First Nations women.

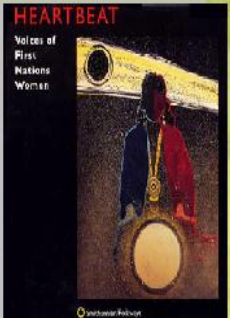
The research goal is to engage eight First Nations women over eighteen years of age, from north western Ontario in a conversation about their life.

Important themes to be explored are spirituality or religious beliefs, identity, gender, and domestic violence. The stories you will share could reveal how they play out in experiences throughout your community.

ARE YOU INTERESTED?

Would you talk about how you coped with domestic violence incidents that occurred before 2008?

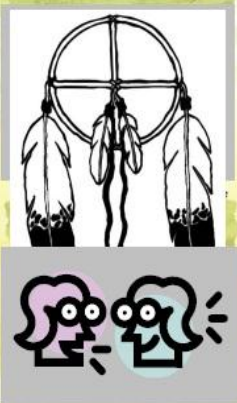
Could you spare one hour and half for an initial interview?



Picture by: Watermark Design -
Courtesy of Southwestern Folkways Recordings

"We all speak many languages, but we can listen with One instrument" Kirlew 09

Take A Package and Let Us Talk Together!
 Yolaine Kirlew
 Phone: 613.447.7430
 Fax: 613.228.7461
 Unit 1017-27 Auriga Drive
 Ottawa, Ontario K2E 0R2
kirlewthesproject@hotmail.com



**Please Take a Package
Let Us Talk Together!**
 Yolaine Kirlew B.A., B.A., MA
 (candidate)
 Phone: 613.447.7430
 Fax: 613.228.7461
 Unit 1017-27 Auriga Drive
 Ottawa, Ontario K2E 0R2

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS?

DETERMINING IF THIS STUDY IS FOR YOU

On which Reserve is your Band membership?

Will you be traveling back to your community soon?

Will you be staying in Sioux Lookout for at least a week in February 2010?

Are you currently not in a domestic violence situation?

If you or anyone you know are able to tell me this much, I am inviting you to participate in this Master's research project.

BENEFIT

"It's Your Voice, Your Story"

Participating in this project can afford you the opportunity to share with the university community the multiple ways you encounter conflict and how you deal (cope) with it.

"To share your story is to tell the truth as you've experienced it. To examine how the components of this story work together is to think beyond the experience."
 Kirlew 09

Appendix F
Research Letter to Participating Institution

1017-27 Auriga Drive
Ottawa, ON K2E 0R2

January 2010

Letter to Participating Institution

Director of Treatment Services
Nodin Child and Family Intervention Services
First Nations Health Authority
54 Queen Street P.O. Box 1300
Sioux Lookout, ON P8T 1B8

Dear Director:

Further to our August 6th, 2009 meeting, and as we discussed then, by Sept. 18th, 2009 you would contact me with written communication regarding your organization's structure and indicate the level of commitment it will be able to assist my thesis research. I am anticipating your response soonest on this matter.

As a reminder, I am requesting your permission to have my recruitment packages prominently displayed at your office reception area, along with the advertising poster. Enclosed in each of the packages are various information sheets on the project.

Also, I am seeking the assistance from your organization in these areas:

- 1) A meeting room in February & March where the eight (8) interviews can be held
- 2) To have the assistance of a counsellor in case a volunteer discloses information not previously expressed to her current Nodin counsellor. This counsellor can be either available in person, by phone, or KO Tele health.
- 3) Access to the KO Tele health system for the second (proposed for March) follow up interviews.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Yolaine Kirlew BA., B.A., MA. (Candidate)