

ODE'IMIN (HEART BERRIES):
THE EXPERIENCE OF INDIGENOUS ACADEMICS IN SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMS:
ENGAGING INDIGENOUS IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCE

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HBSW, ALGOMA UNIVERSITY 2018
CYC, SENECA COLLEGE 2013

TORONTO

JUNE 6, 2019

AN MRP PRESENTED TO RYERSON UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER
IN THE PROGRAM OF
SOCIAL WORK

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1: Introduction

Encourage people to learn their own indigeneity, whatever that is. And to be encouraged to go into that. That's part of their healing journey. And that is their responsibility in doing social work because they're doing that for their identity, for their space..." (Stacy).

Social work has had a tenuous relationship with Indigenous peoples in Canada. Looking at various periods historically and currently, social work has positioned itself as an alleged ally of Indigenous peoples and yet it is a perpetrator of the horrific conditions and strife that Indigenous peoples face. Issues like cultural erosion, the breakup of families and language loss are all traced in part to Residential Schools, 60's scoop and the millennial scoop- which social workers have and continue to play a role in executing (Alston-O'Connor, 2010). On one hand, the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) has prioritized "developing stronger connections with Indigenous social workers and communities to better support their issues and pursue shared advocacy goals" (CASW Reconciliation Hub, n.d.). However, Indigenous children continue to be overrepresented in child welfare institutions (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018).

I am an Anishinaabe person with education in child and youth care (CYC) and social work, having multiple years of front-line experience, and experience teaching in a college CYC program. I was not raised in Toronto but rather grew up in Northern Ontario in the small community of Spanish. This upbringing offered many different things to me like close communal and familial connections, as well as close proximity to nature. These connections were viscerally embedded into my worldview as I grew up in a home that routinely practiced Ojibway culture through connections to the land. Although I identify as Ojibway because of my proximity to the culture and teachings, I think it is important to acknowledge that my background is also Finnish, Irish, Scottish, English, French and Metis. My entrance into helping professions also came from

conditions Indigenous communities face as well as the community and surrounding area that I grew up in faces. My interest in identity and the representation of it stems from this upbringing and as well as my own struggles with identity.

I have regularly struggled with my roles as an educator, a social worker and an Anishinaabe person. The intersecting lines of which identity defines me become blurred or rigid as I continue to grow and engage with these different roles. However, I have found that depending on the institution I am attending, the degrees of confluence strengthens or dissipates. While completing my CYC education at Seneca College, a program that had minimal Indigenous focus, I learned a tremendous amount about myself because I was allotted the space in assignments and classes to do so. Though I did not learn to incorporate my *Indigeneity* into youth work, in the long term learning a tremendous amount about myself strengthened my identity as an Anishinaabe person. While I completed my Bachelor of Social Work at Algoma University I learned a significant amount about being an Indigenous social worker within the context of Northern Ontario and this program offered tremendous insight into my Indigeneity. However, sometimes the program lacked other points of knowledge. Now in my Master of Social Work at Ryerson University, I feel a complete backslide as Indigenous understandings and perspectives often feel disregarded or are not presented in a way that feels genuine depending on the professor.

Because of my experience I wanted to learn more about the experience of Indigenous academics in social work programs and how curriculum engages with Indigenous identity. I interviewed two Indigenous social workers to gather their perspectives and teachings on the subject and I decided to use my own teachings as an Indigenous person to guide the research process. My experiences will also be integrated into the learning experience as this research is also self-explorative. Further, I will continue to integrate my connection to this topic throughout

the paper, this will help keep my social location grounded in the research. These teachings (which will be explained in the methodology and framework section) are based on Anishinaabe perspectives of strawberries and berry picking. Further, I utilized Medicine Wheel Teachings and other research studies to establish a concept of Indigenous identity and build the framework of this research.

Following this, I engaged in a critical discussion about Indigenous identity, what drew the participants to social work, challenges and barriers experienced in their respective programs as Indigenous people, and the extent to which the social work programs they have attended appropriately captured their identity as Indigenous people, a wider perspective of Indigenous identity and how the curriculum interacts with Indigenous identity. Building on these topics and the participants' stories I will offer suggestions for social work programs to consider integrating into their curriculum and classroom settings to better represent Indigenous identity. Ultimately, I will suggest key recommendations in how social work curriculum and programs can best engage with Indigenous identity and experiences.

2: Literature Review: Gathering Supplies

Indigenous identity is filled with complexities that are often not accounted for in Western discourse. When individuals who are non-Indigenous or do not have connections to their teachings attempt to engage Indigenous identity and experience, there can be a misrepresentation in what is truly the essence that makes Indigenous experience and identity distinct. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and public discussion have raised public consciousness about Indigenous issues and identity. The field of social work has also taken up space during the education process to train future practitioners to better understand Indigenous issues, healing and identity. As an Indigenous person I have felt a lot of frustration in human service programs seeing the representation of Indigenous identity being fraught with problematic notions such as inaccurate history, convoluted concepts of teachings and history, lazy presentation, hyper focus on negatives (mental health, addictions etc.), justifications of wrong doings and listening to non-Indigenous people portray themselves as 'experts.' Although there are major gaps in social work education teaching Indigenous perspectives (Compton-Osmond, 2017), there is still limited literature on the subject. However, there is ample literature that discusses the field of social work's role in the destruction of Indigenous identity and culture through Residential Schools and child welfare practices (Compton-Osmond, 2017).

Indigenous identity using quantitative methods

When I began the process of collecting and establishing a foundation of research that addressed my MRP topic, I wanted to include studies that established these concepts from different perspectives. Some of the research used quantitative and positivist perspectives. Studies completed by Gonzalez and Bennett (2011), and Gfellner and Armstrong (2011) are examples of quantitative approaches in the data collection process of establishing Indigenous identity. The former completed research among Ojibway folk by repurposing the African American Identity

Scale to the Native Identity Scale (NIS). Using this scale, the study concluded that Indigenous people who are connected to culture, attend community events with other Indigenous folks and take pride in their culture rated 'higher' (meaning that their Indigenous identity was more central to them) (Gonzalez & Bennett, 2011). The Native Identity Scale that specifically looked at how central their Indigeneity was to the self-concept, their view of other people, self-concept in relation to the public and interactions with other oppressed demographics (Gonzalez & Bennett, 2011).

The study, although it had interesting findings that are not harmful to Indigenous identity, was fraught with ill-conceived methods of data collection. A critical issue that arises throughout the research is that it does not contribute much in the way of the discussion of Indigenous identity. The authors do not take time to acknowledge why the research is being completed, their location in relation to the community or what the research will go on to contribute to. Castellano (2004) discusses the limitations of Western and mainstream approaches which rely on reductionist methods. Reductionist methods are research techniques that reduce complex systems into simpler categories (Harvey, 2018). Gonzalez and Bennett (2011) neglect to discuss the holistic components of Indigenous identity and put the focus on social interactions. Further, Gonzalez and Bennett (2011) do not discuss *deeper implications of the findings*. The research only touches the surface level of identity. Reductionist methods are dangerous techniques to use any time identity is going to be represented as identity should not be reduced or limited. Further, what is clear in looking at research is that Indigenous identity and experience is constantly being misrepresented and reductionist techniques further misrepresent this identity.

Gfellner and Armstrong (2011) also took a quantitative approach to establish another component of Indigenous identity. This research takes a quantitative approach to determine if there is a relation between the healthy development of ego and identity among Indigenous youth

(Gfellner & Armstrong, 2011). A sample of 227 youth participated in the research were required to complete multiple scales such as the Washington Sentence Completion Test, Psychological Inventory of Ego Strengths and the Bicultural Identity Measure (Gfellner & Armstrong, 2011). Ultimately the scales established to what degree the youth identify with their Indigeneity and then this information was screened in relation to signs of healthy ego development (Gfellner & Armstrong, 2011). The research found that youth who identify exclusively as Indigenous (as opposed to bicultural) have higher scores in regard to love, care, purpose and fidelity which identified a healthy indication of ego development (Gfellner & Armstrong, 2011). It was also concluded that female students had developed ego quicker than male students, high school students scored higher than grade school students and, most interestingly, students who identified as traditional developed deeper understandings of abstract concepts like love which, Gfellner and Armstrong (2011) discuss as being a product of Indigenous culture placing a high value on love as a core component of Indigenous identity.

The research completed by Gfellner and Armstrong (2011) does not perpetrate negative stereotypes or promote an ill-conceived message about Indigenous people. In fact, the findings of their research are consistent with experiences and other research that will be discussed in latter sections of this paper. However, the research struggles in a way that limits the holistic perspective of Indigenous people by focussing only on mental health and not discussing other critical components like spiritual, emotional, physical realms and the larger community. Understanding larger community elements like connectedness, spirituality and traditions is imperative among Indigenous peoples. Michell (2009) discusses the significance of bringing communities together to better inform the research which also brings opportunity for community healing.

Although these research studies are not overtly racist or oppressive towards Indigenous people, the purpose of the research, authors relevance, and the methods of data collection are problematic. In particular, both studies were completed using detached and quantitative approaches, which commodifies Indigenous bodies and identity to check boxes. The authors failed to identify their reasoning for completing the research or discuss their social location and positionality. This created an obvious power dynamic in that the researchers did not establish a relationship with the participants throughout the process. Further, the research does not contribute much in the way of furthering knowledge or bringing about emancipation from oppression. Rather, the opposite occurs. Indigenous identity is commodified and packaged using anthropological approaches to understand the Indigenous mind better.

Indigenous identity using qualitative methods

Other research studies have approached the conceptualization of Indigeneity using a more qualitative approach. Hadjiyanni and Helle (2008) use a modernized conception of Indigenous identity by looking at how modern homes reflect identity. Their study found that temporal space can be used in Indigenous homes to connect to traditional knowledge and culture (Hadjiyanni & Helle, 2008). The ways in which physical space is filled and utilized is a factor that is often not accounted for when assessing the experience of Indigenous academics in social work programs. Other research looks at the holistic connection between geographic land and Indigenous bodies (Wilson & Peters, 2005; Tobias & Richmond, 2016). The connection is discussed as being deeper than the notion that Indigenous people have lived on Turtle Island for many generations. Rather, the authors discuss the non-linear nature of a holistic connection between physical, mental, emotional and spiritual interconnectivity between Indigenous identity, other people and the *earth* (Wilson & Peters, 2005; Tobias & Richmond, 2016).

Indigenous knowledge is passed through generations using a variety of methods like narrative or oral traditions and art (to name a few). Research attempting to capture Indigenous identity would benefit from using a non-linear and narrative approaches. However, even existing research using this approach still must be done in an appropriate way. In particular, researchers must ensure they ground their identities in the text so that the purpose of the research is clear, and the reader understands the lens by which the content is written. Hadjiyanni and Helle (2008), as well as Wilson and Peters (2005) fail to identify their social location in the literature.

By contrast, in the work completed by Tobias and Richmond (2016) the authors acknowledge that one is Indigenous while the other is not. Further, the authors acknowledge their social location and establish the purpose of what they intend to accomplish through the research. Tobias and Richmond's (2016) research used learning circles in two Indigenous communities where elders and youth were invited to promote relationships between the generation of Indigenous peoples through increasing time on traditional lands, physical health and community connectivity and pride (Tobias & Richmond, 2016). This research utilized a methodological approach of knowledge translation throughout the entirety of the research process which has an "ability to act as an interface between two distinct ways of knowing that often seem in opposition" (Tobias & Richmond, 2016, p. 231). Using this approach properly ensured that the research was done collaboratively and honoured both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing while also representing the participants' voices.

Indigeneity in the city

Because my research was completed in an urban context, it is important to evaluate literature that analyzes urban Indigenous identity as well. A major concept that was exposed looking at research was that an individual's identity goes beyond conceptions of themselves (Wilson & Peters, 2005; Silver, Ghorayshi, Hay & Klyne, 2006). Interestingly, although

connections to earth and ancestral territories are discussed, these projects engaged with research participants who were urban Indigenous folk thus the findings dealt largely with notions of community as being a major component of Indigeneity (Wilson & Peters, 2005; Silver, Ghorayshi, Hay & Klyne, 2006). Community takes a specific importance in urban contexts because there is so much diversity in large urban landscapes like Toronto, Indigenous identity can become lost in the shuffle of the city (Wilson & Peters, 2005). Further research completed by Carter, Lapum, Lavallee, Martin and Restoule (2017) includes a discussion of the connection between Indigenous identity and living a holistic life, balancing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual realms. Although finding identity among the community was discussed, this research focussed on other themes like the process of learning and sharing knowledge, knowing familial and ancestral history, and being connected to culture as critical components of Indigenous identity (Carter et al., 2017).

Indigenous identities and social work education

Establishing a framework for Indigenous identity was critical for my research process as I examined how Indigenous identity is being presented in social work classrooms. To understand the educational component, I searched for literature that discussed social work education and its relationship with Indigenous identity. Somewhat to my surprise, there is little accessible literature that discusses the field of social work's presentation of Indigenous identity. Because of the lack of previous research, I relied on gray literature to establish a baseline of where social work education is with regards to representing Indigenous knowledge and identity.

Looking at Indigenous identity in high school settings, Kanu (2007) found that Indigenous students engaged in the class when Indigenous content was presented. Further, the research found that when more complex concepts were discussed like sovereignty, culture and spirituality, and when the classroom incorporated Indigenous philosophical ideologies

Indigenous students thrived academically (Kanu, 2007). Although high school education and classroom settings differ from university level social work classrooms, it is important to acknowledge the underlining theme that Kanu (2007) presented in the research, which stated that there needed to be *philosophical changes* to the classroom structure for there to be a visceral response from the Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Gair, Miles and Jane (2005) found similar results looking at their own classrooms in a BSW program in Australia. In particular, their research also found that there had to be philosophical changes to curriculum and classroom structure to engage with Indigenous content. They found that class lectures merely incorporated themes *about* Indigenous people but neglected experiential knowledge (Gair, Miles & Jane 2005). Freeman (2008) completed qualitative research looking at the experiences of Indigenous women enrolled in a teaching education program. The study found that curriculum was not relevant to Indigenous people and was not presented through a lens of Indigeneity (Freeman, 2008). All three studies touched on a similar theme without fully stating it: Indigenous content presented from a Western lens does not capture or engage Indigenous identity and larger changes had to take place.

Researcher identities and ways of knowing

Carter et al. (2017) made discernable efforts to ensure the social location of the researchers remained grounded in the process. The authors discussed the significance of their positionality and connection to the subject matter in research exploring Indigenous identity as perceived by non-Indigenous front-line nursing staff. This research also incorporated a symbolic and discussion-based process as the research participants discussed their identity and understanding of wellness based on an object that they held dear and which was a part of their culture (Carter et al., 2017). This research was very interesting because of the care that the researchers put into learning about Indigenous culture before beginning the research by

incorporating the concept of ‘Two-Eyed Seeing.’ Two-Eyed Seeing is an Indigenous paradigm initially promoted by Albert Marshall that pairs Western and Indigenous worldviews which focuses on “learning to use both eyes together, for the benefit of all” (as cited in Institution for Integrative Science and Health, n.d.). Two-Eyed Seeing is a perspective that stresses the need to hold two worldviews as equal in order to gain a better understanding of knowledge (Whiting, Cavers, Bassendowski & Petrucka, 2018; Martin, 2012). Furthermore, Two-Eyed Seeing “stems from the belief that there are many ways to understand the world” (Martin, 2012, p. 31). Although Two-Eyed Seeing is very important in research, it is important to acknowledge that there is the potential that it be used as an excuse to continue adhering to Western knowledge and not fully Indigenize research processes. For this reason, Two-Eyed Seeing was used in components of the research process where it was applicable and strengthened the methodology. However, it was not relied on as I closely followed Anishinaabe teachings.

Concepts of Two-Eyed Seeing can also be seen in the research that Wilson and Peters (2005) and Silver, Ghorayshi and Klyne (2006) completed although the model is not explicitly stated in their processes. These researchers took a narrative approach in their data collection and weigh Indigenous knowledge as equally important as Western knowledge by using Western methods and paradigms but explicitly promoting holistic perspectives of self/health, identity and importance of community (Wilson & Peters, 2005; Silver, Ghorayshi & Klyne, 2006). Silver, Ghorayshi and Klyne (2006) look at critical components of the self within the community and note that community development is only done through the process of knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is also critical to Tobias and Richmond (2016) as they focus on the relationship between elders and youth and carrying on traditions through oral methods. This is an important observation because Indigenous identity and pedagogy place the exchange of

knowledge in high regard; this can be seen in traditions and knowledge being orally disseminated through generations of Indigenous people.

Research that focussed on urban Indigenous populations relied on literature being validated by Indigenous people's experience through interviews with Indigenous people with experiential knowledge (Wilson & Peters, 2005; Silver, Ghorayshi & Klyne, 2006; Tobias & Richmond, 2016). Graveline (1998) discusses the concept of first-voice pedagogy which focuses on the critical importance of lived experience being valid research. However, despite the researchers using first-voice pedagogy, they also still fail to locate themselves within the context of urban Indigenous people. There is only a brief mentioning of the researchers being "experienced" or "naïve" but there is no other acknowledgement of the researcher's location in the context of the research, or a reason to complete the research (Wilson & Peters, 2005; Silver, Ghorayshi & Klyne, 2006). However, Tobias and Richmond (2016) avoid this issue by discussing how the research will contribute to community development like elder and youth relations and promoting healthy communities.

Because there are few research studies that look at Indigenous identity and social work education, I relied on gray literature that discusses similar concepts. Kanu (2007) and Freeman (2008) use a counter-storytelling research method to look at how Indigenous content can be incorporated into high school and teacher education classes in a manner that is meaningful. Further, it was found that participants drive in achieving education was with the intention of improving their communities (Freeman, 2008). Gair, Miles and Thompson (2005) completed research on courses that they were teaching at the BSW level and concluded that they tended to talk 'about' Indigenous people but did not account for experiential, first-hand knowledge. Both research studies used counter-storytelling techniques to write a different narrative demonstrating how Indigenous content should be presented in educational environments (Kanu, 2007; Gair,

Miles & Thompson, 2005). Researchers were careful to center themselves in the research process and acknowledge their social location and privileges.

This literature review has identified multiple epistemological issues in current literature that relates to Indigenous identity. Examples such as: narrow perspectives of quantitative data collection, Western worldviews being dominant, not locating oneself in the research or reason to even complete the research. I plan to address these different issues in my own research through the use of my teachings which follows a model based on traditional processes of strawberry picking which places an emphasis on community, self-identity, self-location and proper dissemination so the product is beneficial to the community. Furthermore, I have been critically engaging in an inner dialogue to center my identity as an Anishinaabe person and any other intersections that arise from my identity before I engage in the research. This is similar to Langhout (2006) who discusses the critical importance of not just assessing one component of your identity but putting all intersections under the microscope. This is important as it will ensure that I have located myself within the research process and that my values and perspectives are not placed above the participants but rather that we entered into the research process as equals. This concept relates to Two-Eyed Seeing which will also play a role in my research as I need to balance conflicting perspectives between Indigenous and Western paradigms. Finally, I did complete this research for myself but rather to understand how social work education can be improved with regards to Indigenous content. This knowledge can be used by other Indigenous people.

3: Methodology: Deciding Where to Pick

Strawberries and me

It is important to acknowledge that these strawberry teachings cannot be referenced in a conventional manner as the knowledge cannot be credited to a single source. I have spent my life picking berries and learning about them from a variety of people. For this reason, I will acknowledge some of the teachers, elders and knowledge keepers I have been grateful to have the opportunity to learn from: Joseph Pitawanakwat, Dr. Rainey Gaywish, Eddy Benton-Benai, my grandmother Angeline Santikko and my father Dave Lawrence. Although there are some references to books and websites throughout this section, these are more for the reader's benefit to read further into strawberry knowledge.

On a personal level, I have always felt a visceral connection to strawberries. As a young person I was brought up in a home that routinely practiced sustainability through hunting, fishing and gathering. We were taught how to do these things properly and ensure that the land and animals were taken care of. We were also berry-folk (a term I now intend to coin). My parents grew up in homes that routinely picked berries. As a result, my parents passed this routine to myself and my siblings. The plethora of berries and cherries were a constant in our diets as our parents brought us to pick many species of colourful fruit such as: blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, thimbleberries, choke cherries, beach cherries, cranberries, winter green berries, and of course my personal favorite: the strawberry.

Berry picking invokes memories and a deep connection to family, community and duties to take care of those around you. With only a moment's thought I am brought back to sweltering summer days near the north shores of Lake Superior with my family picking berries. My arms red from the thorns or my back aching from bending over but enduring in pursuit of the berry. It is a memory that I could never forget as I was on the land learning from my parents and

grandmother, Angeline Santikko in the same place that she picked berries as a little girl. I am still in awe of the way my grandmother picked berries despite her aging, frail body and the burning sun. I always make sure that when I harvested wild berries my grandmother and family received some of the fruits of my labour. The strawberry is the most difficult of all of these fruits to pick simply because of my height and that wild strawberries only grow a few inches from the ground. To accomplish this, I tend to lay on the ground and pick the berries around me and slowly make my way around a patch. This process only creates another level of connection to the product that I am working to harvest.

Significance of strawberries

Strawberries represent many things to Anishinaabe people. Strawberries were first presented to Waynaboozhoo as an *integral* component of who he was (Benton-Benai, 2010). Further, Waynaboozhoo is often compared to a researcher as he was given the task of learning about all plants and animals when he was placed on earth. The strawberries resemble a heart in their appearance and much like the human body which has veins, muscles and bones throughout the body, strawberry plants are connected through a scattered series of roots, shoots and runners that maintain the health of the plant. Strawberries are also symbolic of reconciliation and maintaining healthy relationships (Kanawayhitowin, n.d.; Glitsnap, 2014). This teaching crosses into metaphysical realms as strawberries represent the importance of balance between physical, mental, emotional and spiritual realms of well-being ('Strawberry Teachings,' n.d.). Further the strawberry represents important components of the Midewiwin as these healers and philosophers needed to have balanced knowledge with the highest ethical standards in order to bring together the healing properties of the "plant and self" (Zhaawan Giizhik, n.d.). Strawberries also play an important role in the lives of Anishinaabe women as they participate in a berry fast (Meawaasige, 2013).

Strawberries as a framework for good research

But what does my connection to strawberries have to do with social work? Strawberries seek to restore wellbeing and balance among people. Strawberries represent the joining of ethical standards, wellbeing and practical application ('Strawberry teachings,' n.d.; Zhaawan Giizhik, n.d.). Strawberries represent social connections and research. Strawberries represent the coming together of families and communities. Michell (2009) discuss how berry picking promotes social and personal interconnectedness as it is a therapeutic process. All of these things are components that social work *likes to believe it also does or processes that it enacts*. Regarding education, Fixico (2009) plainly states that "the native mind-set is a combination of physical and metaphysical dimensions" (p. 92) and this is something that Western education has failed to understand. This Anishinaabe perspective is an integral component of my personal approach to social work practice and these components will also be the guiding principles of the research process. This strawberry framework will be elaborated on in the "framework" section.

Data collection

Following proper, ancestral protocol is imperative to ensure that this research is done in a respectful way. Within sections of the research process that are applicable, a two-eyed seeing approach will be utilized to ensure that multiple perspectives are incorporated and held in equal accord (Martin, 2012). For this reason, another major component that will be stressed in this research is Graveline's (1998) approach of first-voice pedagogy. First voice pedagogy is an approach that stresses the importance of those with lived experience being given a voice to tell their stories (Graveline, 1998). Further, Castellano (2004) discusses the importance of research being shared with Indigenous communities to continue the process of healing and learning.

A critical component of this methodological approach is the utilization of stories. In frontline social work, the process of sharing stories is used to create connections, gain

understanding, pass information and instill hope. The process of picking berries creates a time for community and family members to talk and pass stories to one another. Kovach (2009) states “Stories are vessels for passing along teachings, medicines, and practice that can assist members of the collective” (p. 95). It is this reason why it is imperative that the research was collected in a way that pays respect to the individualistic nature of the participant’s stories and that there is space given so that each story is able to take on a life of its own. Further, this approach raises opportunity for the differing nations to present stories from their perspective and the capacity that social work education can best present Indigenous identity through stories in their programs.

It is this narrative approach that makes Graveline’s (1998) first voice pedagogy and Albert Marshall’s two-eyed seeing so applicable. These approaches can be utilized together so that the individual voices are raised but held in equal accord. This holds me accountable to ensure the stories are being presented as they were given to me and my own perspectives do not skew the intentions of the original speaker. Further, it ensures that certain stories are not inhibited in any way but are all in equal accord. This is not only meant for the writing process but was meaningful during the stage of interaction and data collection as well.

Because the narrative approach has been taken the data was collected utilizing a learning circle format. Learning circles are critical components to Indigenous people as they offer equal opportunity for each participant to convey their opinion as Indigenous people believe in a holistic, circular existence (Fixico, 2009; Hart, 2007). However, my usage of learning circles had to be deeper than face-value and transcend into deeper paradigm thinking as I needed to ensure that the circle was done in a good way that followed proper protocol. Learning circles offer much in the way of teachings as they promote holistic interconnectedness, and this is a concept that can promote notions of community. Further, the circle also helped alleviate the power imbalance between myself and the participants. This concept is critical as among Indigenous people

research done in a good way is a form of ceremony and community (Hart, 2007). If there are active power imbalances within this dynamic, then this ceremony will be unhealthy.

I established a fixed set of questions that addressed broad concepts within the research topic. These questions were used to open the discussion; however, questions or subjects also arose that were applicable in the research. This was important as I did not want the discussion to be completely structured and limit the participants from expressing their experiences. It was important that the dialogue was able to flow naturally, and each participant was allotted the space to speak to their experience in a way they felt was appropriate. To further this process, I actively participated in the discussion to promote transparency and connectedness as Indigenous people navigating Western institutions. The six questions that were asked of the participants were:

- What does Indigenous identity mean to you?
- Why did you decide to pursue social work?
- Are there areas of confluence between social work and your identity as an Indigenous person?
- What were/are some struggles/successes in your BSW program?
- To what capacity does/did your BSW program reflect Indigenous identity?
- How can social work programs better incorporate Indigenous knowledge, history and healing?

It is also important that participants are able to contribute to research processes in more ways than just through their stories. Tuck and Yang (2014) discuss how certain populations have been over-researched to a point of there being immediate resistance to any forms of research. Further, social sciences commodify the pain of people's stories and package it in a way that laments the innate power differences between Western academia and other knowledge (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Castellano (2004) discusses that Indigenous perspectives and knowledge need to be

ingrained into the framework and approach of the research. Further, Indigenous peoples need to have control over the type of research that is being done, how the research is done and the dissemination of the research once it is completed (Castellano, 2004).

As an Indigenous person it is important that I do this type of research but that I also ensured that the research followed proper Anishinaabe protocol. That being said, it was also critical that my research process had space for participants to assert their Indigenous ways of knowing. This ensured that there was holistic balance within the circle and my Anishinaabe ways of knowing did not outweigh the perspectives or the teachings that the participants brought into the space. Historically, Indigenous people have had their knowledge taken which has been seen in systemic institutions like Residential Schools (Compton-Osmond, 2017). It is critical that this research does not expect others to forgo their Nation's knowledge. Instead, this research encourages themes of reciprocity as I shared my teachings and experience in exchange for teachings and narratives from the participants. Further, using these teachings held me accountable to the censure of my family and nation which is much more critical to uphold.

4: Framework: Where and how to pick

It is critical to acknowledge that the framework uses some themes from Herman Michell's text *Gathering Berries in Northern Contexts: A Woodland Cree Metaphor for Community Based Research* (2009). Although Michell's text will be referenced because of its relevance and applicability, this research framework follows the same processes that I was taught before, during and after berry picking and are distinct to my Anishinaabe teachings. Although these teachings are applicable to picking any types of fruit or berries, they were specifically given to me for strawberry picking. These teachings are very special and hold a lot of significance on personal, familial and cultural levels. To give the most amount of context possible within the capacity of this paper, I will break down the four steps and go through each process in detail in relation to berry picking and the significance in the research that I will be completing. Because Western knowledge and education is based on colonizing perspectives the framework of this research will be based exclusively on Indigenous perspectives. As Cole (2006) states:

there is no post when it comes to colonialism in case you haven't noticed you're the one standing at the front of a class telling us about us and our land and cultures this is why we are investing in post-secondary education to learn about ourselves second or third-hand from misinformed objective positioning (as cited in Long & Dickason, 2016, p. 14).

Indigenous perspectives are often paired with Western concepts to "validate" Indigenous knowledge. The above quote speaks to the reality of Indigenous knowledge standing on its own and that it does not need to be validated by Western perspectives. As an Indigenous person it is imperative that decolonization is upheld as an outlying goal of this research as Western education cannot provide or accomplish decolonization given its structure (Kovach, 2009). Further, because of the significance these teachings hold they *will not be* coupled with Western concepts or approaches as those perspectives hold no ethical or applicable weight in comparison.

I-Before going picking

Before any berry picking can take place, you must first be taught how to pick berries properly. To some this is not a complicated thing to do: grab a container, find strawberries and pick them from the ground. In much the same way this is also how research has been done when it comes to Indigenous peoples. Using these teachings, it is stressed that before I can pick berries I must understand what the berries do, where they can be found, what role they play, what time they can be picked, where I can pick them and how many I should be picking-among many other things. This arduous process is not simply for the sake of complication but rather, places significance on mine and the berries' roles as interconnected objects. Michell (2009) states that "I grew up knowing that I was a part of the land and the land was a part of me" (p. 66).

In much the same capacity, this research must follow these pre-emptive procedures before engaging in the research process. I created research questions that are discussed through the process. Engaging in this process also ensured that I assessed my own social location and reason for pursuing such research. I reflected on my own experience as an Indigenous academic and how that swayed my interpretation of the results. Further, I engaged in critical self-reflection of the things that have formed my identity as an Indigenous person with a mixed background. I considered how my experience influences how I will approach writing and interactions to complete the research. I assessed why I chose these teachings and how they informed this research process based on my understanding of them and their applicability. This framework also stressed the importance of my role as it interacts with the participants who chose to share their stories with me in the learning circle. I completed a thorough literature review to assess who else has looked at Indigenous identity and the relation to social work education.

II- Deciding where to pick

You take into consideration many different things when finally deciding where and when to go pick. You consider the others who may also be seeking berries (both humans and animals). You need to consider who you are picking the berries for, and what purpose they will serve. Finally, you must actually decide where you will be going and picking the strawberries. This knowledge is obtained through lived experience or consultation with a knowledge keeper. If you have never gone strawberry picking you will need some guidance about where to find the berries. If you have picked berries before, however, you base your decisions on your own knowledge. If you are not picking on grounds that you have ancestral ties to then you need to seek permission before picking. It is imperative that these factors are considered before picking so that you *do not hurt others by not following proper protocol*.

These teachings guide how I decided to lay the groundwork in the research that I completed. I picked a subject matter that is close to my heart as I have education in social work and have acquired a lot of experience in practice. I have been employed at multiple organizations where non-Indigenous social work staff are not competent with regards to appropriately serving Indigenous populations. For this reason, the research is to improve education in social work programs to ultimately improve service delivery on a practical and policy level. I decided to look at stories from Indigenous social workers who attended BSW and MSW programs to better understand the experiences of these academics and the content that is taught regarding Indigenous identity. Indigenous identity will be viewed through a lens of the Medicine Wheel teachings. These teachings view identity and a healthy sense of self from a physical, emotional, spiritual and mental perspective. Further, it is important that this research is done in a way that honours research that will come before it and after it. It is also critical that the research participants holistic safety is constantly considered and upheld over the needs of the research.

III- While you're picking

Once you have chosen a place to pick and arrive at the location you can then start to harvest berries. However, there are still many things that you must be mindful of while picking. You must consider who else will be picking from this location. This does not merely include the other humans that pick in that area but also the animals and plants that are reliant on berries as well. For this reason, you never harvest more than two thirds of the berries. Further, you must be mindful to give thanks for the berries that you are picking as the berries are a gift and you must be mindful to not harm the plant while picking the berries so that it can continue to grow and prosper. Berry picking is also a time to be with community and promote individual and group wellbeing (Michell, 2009). Normally, I berry pick with my biological family or my wife. It is imperative that you remain grounded in the teachings and protocol while you are picking as it holds you ethically accountable to the natural law and honourable compact that Indigenous people have followed since time immemorial (Pitawanakwat, 2012; Copway, 2001).

It is critical that I choose a location to host the learning circle that is comfortable for the participants and that promotes wellness. I must be cognizant and remain mindful that I am collecting the stories and experiences from Indigenous scholars and not to overstay my welcome in this process. More so, I must make sure that I am only collecting information as it is relevant to my research and not collecting knowledge that would only benefit me. Similarly, these teachings hold me accountable to follow protocol, ensuring that I am taking care of the participant's wellbeing and my own before, during and after the research process. Because of the nature of the teachings and my identity as an Anishinaabe person, I am bound by natural law and the ethical protocol of Anishinaabe teachings. These teachings ensure that I am constantly engaging in a good way and that I am cognizant of the differing perspectives, teachings and experiences that the different participants will bring into the research process with them. Michell (2009) states that "For a healthy yield of berries, it is important to foster values of cooperation

and respect for the good of the whole" (p. 66). I must ensure that I leave space for others to incorporate their ways of knowing and teachings in the learning circle.

IV-Dissemination of the fruit

You have harvested your berries and now they must be put to use. It is not a part of Anishinaabe teachings to stock the fruits of labour for your own purpose or for petty gains. If it was something that was taken from creation, then it is something that must be appreciated and used on a communal level. There are a variety of options that can be done with strawberries once they are harvested. Personally, I love making jam with the berries but simply eating them raw is a reward in and of itself. Regardless of what I choose to do with the berries I always make sure that the product is shared communally with those around me. In doing this I make sure that I have properly inspected and cleaned the fruit so that I am not giving something that is spoiled, rotten or contaminated to the recipients. I also ensure that I am not stocking most of the reward for myself but sharing the product equally and that the family unit feels welcome to share in the fruit.

When looking at the research that I wanted to complete, I had to put extra work into ensuring the fruit of the research is disseminated in a way that represents the participants and the teachings that have guided the process. I need to ensure that I am not putting information back into the community that is spoiled or rotten with ill-conceived perspectives or attempts at self-gain. Further, I need to make sure that the research results are available to the community to use and feel welcome to share in the results to further promote Indigenous well-being.

These four stages represent the four corners that will hold up the research process. This framework is based on the same principles that I was taught to consider and uphold while picking strawberries. The connection between this framework and my research is simply because

berry picking is healing and community. As berries are being gathered there are stories being told and through this process and healing and bonding are taking place (Michell, 2009).

5: Analysis and Findings: Picking Strawberries

I met with two participants in a learning circle format. We met in an Indigenous space in downtown Toronto to ensure the participants felt comfortable and able to practice their spiritual and cultural practices unabated. The first participant (Sue) recently completed a BSW and is currently enrolled in an MSW program in Toronto. This participant identifies as Mohawk and is originally from the greater area of Toronto. The second participant (Stacy) had completed a BSW a few years prior and is also completing her MSW at a university in Toronto. This participant identifies as Anishinaabe and is originally from a city in Northern Ontario. The names used in this work are not the participant's real names, but pseudonyms created to protect their identities.

Shoots and runners I:

What is Indigenous identity:

"I think it's like you said, there's no fixed definition. But for myself, but what it's been meaning for me in my journey is going back [and] returning to our ancestors. Humbling myself trying to learn the language... [and when] speaking the language you evoke those vibrations. [Or] like returning or going up to Manitoulin and being in the land, listening to the stories, singing the songs, participating in the community..." (Stacy).

The discussion started by looking at the participants perspectives of critical features of Indigenous identity. Indigenous identity becomes a balancing act of self-discovery, learning about family history, culture, teachings and language while simultaneously resisting Western perspectives and systems. It would be too simple to merely say 'Indigenous identity' is complicated without fully looking at the complexities that make it complicated or the specific features that entail what constitutes an Indigenous person. Through the discussion it became apparent that there is much more to the identity than simply being of Indigenous heritage and not

exploring it more, although the participants were quick to acknowledge that if a person decides to make that choice it is fine to do. However, for the participants of this study Indigenous identity becomes more of a cyclical process rather than an outcome-based process.

Both participants highlighted themes such as connection to the land, listening to stories and teachings, engaging with community, participating in cultural practices and self-discovery and healing. Many of these themes were also found in literature that was reviewed as well as my own conceptions of Indigeneity. Copway (2001) discusses Ojibway connections to culture and land being intertwined and that this is a major aspect of Indigeneity. Another focus that came out in the discussions was the experience of learning about Indigenous identity while living in a major urban center like Toronto. Both participants have lived most of their lives in Toronto or the GTA and identified the importance of having Indigenous community close to Toronto but also returning to the communities to which they trace their ancestry. This type of connection to a physical piece of land was critical to both participants.

Because of my background and teachings, the Medicine Wheel teachings were used to construct the concept of Indigenous identity by looking at the four quadrants. The four quadrants are the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual realms. Connecting identity to this it became apparent that the different components that were discussed by participants can all fall within multiple realms of the Medicine Wheel teachings and can add more layers to a definition of Indigeneity. Further, the Medicine Wheel promotes concepts of balance and healing. This theme became very critical during the learning circle.

The lonely process

“...something that I really have discovered with discovering my Indigenous identity is, it's bare, [and] it's a very lonely process...” (Sue).

One theme that was discussed was the process of internally reclaiming Indigenous identity. Previous to this research, I had not fully considered this as an extension of Indigeneity. I was raised in a family that promoted Indigenous perspectives and discernibly knew the land where our ancestors reside. However, the topic raised a similar consideration for me which is that everyone has been affected by colonization and that these affects are day to day and tangible (Schiffer, 2016). All Indigenous people have been affected by colonization in some capacity and this has become a component of the identity because of a mutual need to heal through it. Yet, as highlighted in the statement from the participant, despite this mutual experience of losing components of Indigenous identity the process to self-rediscovery is a lonely time.

Both participants discussed how they have always been aware of their Indigenous ancestry but only began to learn more about this component later in their life. Both participants had similar experiences and identified similar themes in the process to discover more about their Indigenous ancestry. Although both participants identified the need for community as a component of Indigenous identity, both acknowledged that they did not feel a tremendous amount of support from local Indigenous groups early on in their journey, but later started to feel supported. This theme will be elaborated on later as it relates to social work education and its integration of Indigenous teachings and identity.

Identity is resistance

“Yeah for myself it's a calling towards remembering. Like blood memory and that's my whole journey... And it's the act of the resistance...” (Stacy).

A theme that emerged from the discussions was that Indigenous identity is tied to themes of resistance. These themes can be seen in environmental and social justice activism that Indigenous people do. However, resistance can also be seen in Indigenous peoples maintaining cultures and traditional knowledge through years of genocide enacted by Canada. Resistance

becomes a major pillar of Indigenous identity when looking at how Indigenous peoples have not been complacent in the attempted assimilation of our identity into Canadian culture. This theme will be discussed more in the implications section of this paper.

Connecting these themes back to the Medicine Wheel Teachings, I believe Indigenous identity is tied to the four realms that the Teachings speak to. Indigenous identity is tied to physical, mental, emotional and spiritual realms and each component that the participants spoke to viscerally connects to each realm. Further, the Medicine Wheel Teachings also speak to the need to understand the self in relation to the community and that for one to be healthy and well, the other must also be. To a much similar capacity, the participants also identified a need to take care of themselves, but this care is done within the context of healing among the community. Because of the complexities Indigenous identity plays out as a narrative rather than a mere acknowledgement of ancestral connections. Both participants discussed that it is a journey that they are on and not a destination they are at.

Establishing a concept of Indigenous identity was imperative for this research so that I can better understand the experiences of the participants. It would not be conducive to simply rely on my experiences and knowledge as this would contradict the framework of the research and not give space for community togetherness and the sharing of teachings and knowledge.

Shoots and Runners II:

Early interaction with social work

It is imperative to establish the participant's reasons for entering into social work as a profession and what areas of confluence or conflict they felt existed between their Indigenous identity and social work. These areas of confluence and conflict are a critical analysis of the ways in which the participants' personal practice style uses Indigenous methods and if this comes into conflict with mainstream social work values and ethics. This topic was critical to

discuss as it establishes the participants' connection to social work and their personal practice models/styles as they pertain to their ancestral background. Sue noted the ways she was pathologized in coping with specific challenges for ten to fifteen years:

" I went to see a psychiatrist and they just put me on meds and shaped me and blamed me.... But then when I went to see a social worker they actually gave me tools and give me gave me ways that I could, I could heal myself." (Sue).

The participants in this study have identified multiple yet interconnected themes of engaging in social work. It is not my objective to create a hierarchy in search of the most glorified reasons to enter into the profession. In the first quote, the participant identifies that through interaction with social workers and receiving appropriate supports they began to feel a connection to the profession. It was identified that the participant had initially attended a psychology course but felt that "the labels that they put on people and prescribed medication" caused more harm than good (Stacy). Corey and Corey (2015) identify a variety of reasons that a person would enter into helping professions and one of these reasons is because of a need to give back. This aligns with Freeman's (2008) findings as it was identified Indigenous teachers were pursuing education to improve their communities. Indigenous people place a strong emphasis on community, healing and passing ways of wellbeing on to others. The participants made it clear that entering into social work was a calling that they felt as they identified needs within their own lives, the family compact and the community.

For myself, it was completely based off needs that I identified in the Northern community that I grew up in and Northern Indigenous communities. Initially, my perspective was based much more on micro perspectives but as I learned more about child and youth care perspectives on ecological systems (Stuart, 2009) and decolonial perspectives, my reasoning for entering into

the profession started to shift. To some degree it feels like I have re-entered the profession on multiple occasions.

Acknowledgement of Indigenous healing through social work

"My uncle who has passed. He struggled with addictions his whole life. Well not his whole life sorry, but most of his adult life... there's lot of good Indigenous organizations in Toronto. He was more on the outskirts of Toronto. I think he kind of slipped through the cracks... I think there needs to be more like supports for the community..." (Sue).

Among Anishinaabe people (and many other Indigenous groups) there are strong ties to concepts of clanship. Each clan functioned as a component of the community which in turn promoted the overall wellbeing of each community member. Interestingly enough, Emile Durkheim discussed this type of community functioning in *The Division of Labour in Society* and he referred to it as “mechanical solidarity” when groups of people need each other to fulfil duties to thrive (as cited in Kauzlarich, 2005). This is compared to modern communities who rely on organic systems in which people can work in silos (as cited in Kauzlarich, 2005). Although sociologists are not necessarily referring to clanships, the concept can be carried over as it speaks to the type of functioning Indigenous community *and* healing as Indigenous communities functioned healthily through people completing tasks that were mutually beneficial for everyone in the community. My clan is the bear clan. The bear clan has been given many duties such as security/policing, medicine and healing. It was the bear clan’s duties to ensure the wellbeing of the community. Although the participants did not explicitly state that they entered into the social work because of their clan, the concept was alluded to through the discussion. The participants identified that they felt both a calling and a natural instinct that drew them to helping

professions and identified it was something that was a *natural* fit with their skills and perspectives.

"I feel like I've been doing social work my whole life. So it just was natural..." (Stacy).

Although there was a personalized identification from both participants to enter social work, there was also an acknowledgement of systemic issues. It has been widely documented that there are high rates of mental health and substance use issues among Indigenous populations in Canada (McMullin, 2010). Further, it has been widely documented that Indigenous communities and agencies are underfunded and as a result Indigenous peoples are underserved and overrepresented in many institutions and child welfare agencies (Giles & Luijk, 2018; Blackstock, 2019). The participants identified that there is always a macro and micro connection to entering into social work. Neither participant focussed on one component but acknowledged larger systemic issues affecting Indigenous people; however, they also identified their personal connection to these issues through family and personal history.

This idea speaks to Indigenous perspectives of interconnectedness. Through the discussion the participants both acknowledged that it is not enough to isolate the personal from the system or vice versa, but that within themselves there is a need to help others but also that there was a larger system which speaks to needs of community care. Again, this concept connects back to themes of Indigeneity and establishes clear motives as to why the research participants decided to pursue social work. Understanding the reasons to engage in social work implicates the ways that Indigenous identity is connected to themes of helping professions.

Shoots and runners III:

Clash of Indigenous and Western approaches to service delivery: Healing is community

"So with my Indigeneity, there's a strong, strong value in relationships. I take that into, into my practice meaning that I just I don't just start off [by] bringing out surveys to get

to know the person. I actually like, take a few sessions before doing any sort of work with the person first [and] get to know them. Where are they from? Why they're there? And [then] something that I know is not really allowed, but I still do it [which is] I continue that relationship with them after..." (Sue).

The participants identified that their process of healing and community is deeply engrained in the way that they practice as social workers, and this often comes into conflict with “traditional” social work practices. However, neither participant completely disregarded social work but rather acknowledged limitations in addressing Indigenous trauma and healing with typical Westernized practice. This was seen in how both participants discussed different ways that they have worked around agency structure and CASW standards of practice in order to deliver much more inclusive and holistic models of healing with service users and community members. One of the participants acknowledged the difficulty in living in this role as an Indigenous social worker while being an active community member. This seemed to be another identified gap in mainstream social work which does not consider that communities do not want or need detached, isolated workers engaging with them but rather active community members working towards a common goal. Yet, these Indigenous social workers still have a need to take care of their own wellbeing by healing through their own trauma as well the accumulation of vicarious trauma that is experienced when working with certain populations that are close in physical, mental, emotional and spiritual proximity to them.

When I finished college, I was steeped in the Western approach to helping professions and my first job out of college was at an Indigenous agency with service users who were homeless or at-risk of homelessness in Toronto. I remember wanting to attend one of the upcoming powwows and almost considered not attending because I knew a lot of clients would also be attending. This was a moment of realization to me that Indigenous understandings of

wellbeing and community are innately tied together and cannot work in isolation. Further, it was during this time that I realized that I could either be a social worker with an Indigenous background or I could be an Indigenous person with *social work credentials*. This small difference greatly affected the way in which I practiced.

"It's like the back of the drum. The sinews keeping going into the center and then going back out. So, we have to keep going back into ourselves and then when we get strong we can go back out into the community..." (Stacy).

Through the discussion the participants made very clear that healing and trauma within themselves, families, and communities are connected and need to be viewed and processed as such. In order for healing to take place the two people must be viscerally interconnected, and this is accomplished through learning about each other in an empathic way. The participants both identified the ways in which they have taken part in healing while still providing healing to others. This perspective was largely shown in a connection to land, culture and community. It is not conducive to practice social work as an isolated member of a community but to fully immerse the practice into the community functioning and provide that healing together. In order to become interconnected *both people* must engage in healing and learning.

Looking at the reasons why the participants decided to pursue social work not only establishes motives for engaging in a helping profession but also connects this motivation to values that are steeped in Indigenous identity. Deep notions of healing and community were invoked which guided the participants to helping professions. What is interesting is that the participants did not identify feeling like they were guided during their tenure in social work programs to this approach of service delivery- rather the participants largely learned Western service delivery styles which come in direct conflict with Indigenous identity.

Shoots and Runners IV:

Who holds power over knowledge

“Being taught Indigenous history and issues from a white person...” (Sue).

Both participants acknowledged struggles and successes while obtaining social work credentials in academic institutions. Both participants felt that there were components in their Bachelor of Social Work programs that captured a wider spectrum of Indigeneity while there were still limitations in the type of curriculum delivery. Initially the participants noted that they did receive some Indigenous themed education, however it was normally delivered by non-Indigenous faculty members. Both participants acknowledged the positive and negative aspects of this experience. On one side, participants discussed how it was important for other, non-Indigenous students to learn about the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada. In the absence of Indigenous faculty, it was critical that students were still able to learn about Indigenous peoples and perspectives. Further, it displayed knowledge on the part of faculty members in delivering curriculum that represented Indigenous history, identity and healing.

However, through the discussion it was clear that being taught about your culture, history and background by largely non-Indigenous professors was an insulting process to go through. Indigenous peoples have faced many facets of reclamation like land, language, culture and traditional forms of governance and sovereignty. However, another area of reclamation Indigenous people face is that of our own history. Although both participants acknowledged that having Indigenous content being taught despite the absence of Indigenous faculty was positive to some degree, it was clear that it was still highly problematic to have this content taught recklessly by someone who is not Indigenous. Further, when the participants attended programs where there is no Indigenous content it was more frustrating. One participant stated that "I feel erased not having it... And when I speak and try to bring it up I feel ostracized. I feel devalued" (Sue). Indigenous people have endured many years of anthropological approaches to our history,

cultures and identities. It can be argued that this has resulted in Indigenous people no longer being in control of our own history or identity. This will be further elaborated on in the implications section.

Stagnant content for shifting identities

"They also spoke about Indigenous peoples like, like historically... They were very stereotypical like all they do is fish and hunt... They never showed positive, [or] successful Indigenous folks..." (Sue).

In my time in human service programs, both as a faculty member and a student, specific periods in Indigenous history often feel like they are presented for shock value. I found this most obvious in how many programs focus heavily on early issues between Indigenous people and Canada/Britain, Residential Schools and then the 60's Scoop. For some reason this content is more interesting to teach rather than discussing the processes Indigenous people have established for fighting against colonization, actualizing reconciliation and engagement in healing through culture, language and community. Further, although the readings are still valuable, many times they focus heavily on older generation's experiences and lack contemporary experiences of younger generations. More contemporary Indigenous writers and academics such as Tanya Talaga, Leanne Simpson, Raven Sinclair, Daniel Heath Justice, Kim Anderson and Jesse Thistle are examples of the younger generation that have released ground breaking work that speaks to historical and current traumas as well as processes of healing.

The hyper focus on trauma feels very derivative of anthropological approaches to Indigenous people. As referenced in the literature review, this type of historical approach is typical of Western perspectives. In the literature review I explored the ways that some studies have focussed strictly on historical or stereotypical components of Indigenous identity like hunting and fishing and failed to look at contemporary components of Indigenous identity and

experiences (Gfellner & Armstrong, 2011; Gonzalez & Bennett, 2011). While some of these stereotypical features can be based in accuracy (for example, I grew up hunting, fishing and gathering various types of plants with my family and this was a natural extension of our geological location and our connection to Indigeneity) this is certainly not the typical experience for many Indigenous people now as 51.8% of Indigenous populations live off reserve and in urban centres (Statistics Canada, 2017). In the case of this research, both participants grew up in urban settings and maintain connections to their original territories and communities while I grew up in a rural setting but off-reserve. Although it is imperative that non-Indigenous students are made aware of the conditions on reserves, there are two issues that arise. First, when content is presented in such a way it laments that these conditions are as a result of the “carelessness” of Indigenous people and not a result of a system that has actively tried to destroy Indigenous people. Second, focussing so deeply on the experience on reserves does not acknowledge that all of the land in which Canada occupies was once Indigenous land. This is an important distinction because it reminds Canada and all of the organizations and institutions of the obligations that need to be fulfilled through the treaties.

Curriculum delivery and student safety

“I was just [in] my early 20s and I didn't even know about residential schools and my grandma went to one. So, when I, when they played the video... they had residential school survivors and intergenerational survivors. And I got triggered like right away... because when I was listening to like what the people were saying, they were just saying, like everything that happened in my life... It just really, it made sense. But in a way it shouldn't have made sense... It shouldn't have been explained to me that way...” (Sue).

The participants also expressed frustration with learning about historical and contemporary concepts regarding Indigenous history and identity. One participant highlighted

that they have had family members who attended Residential Schools and had only learned about this while obtaining their BSW. The participant highlighted the trauma about not only learning the history of Indigenous peoples but also the frustration of learning from a non-Indigenous person and the implications of this history and how it affected their family. This was a powerful statement to make as it was discussed that the non-Indigenous faculty member did not treat the subject with enough care or respect. Further, themes of healing and resistance are not discussed as much as experiences of trauma.

The real issue with using this approach in curriculum delivery is that it merely paints a partial picture of Indigenous experience and identity. Class discussions often do not proceed past the Residential School period to include discussions of intergenerational trauma *or intergenerational healing*. This representation of Indigenous identity tells a story of defeat and compliance but not one of resistance or one that has seen successes. Further, it is content that is being delivered in a way that would be relevant for many Indigenous people from older generations but does not speak to the identity of younger Indigenous peoples. The current generation of Indigenous peoples have not attended Residential Schools but experience the intergenerational trauma as a result of the generations before them attending the schools. This is a huge distinction to make because Indigenous identity is painted in a stagnant light that does not show how the identity and experience has since changed post-Residential School era. I believe Indigenous students should feel their identities being celebrated during classroom discussions and this can be partially accomplished by the narrative being altered to focus on themes of healing and resistance.

"Even though I did run out of the classroom crying. No one checked up on me... which is odd. But, luckily I reached out for my supports during that time..." (Sue).

“It kind of re-triggers and re-shames myself. Like those negative, self-talking comes up.

So I think, I think it goes back to... It re-triggered all my memories of being the only

Indigenous girl or person in my elementary school and high school... So it got me back to

being just alone and being singled out for being different.” (Sue).

Another theme that was raised from this discussion is that faculty did not always seem competent in their ability to deliver Indigenous content and this resulted in triggering affects for the participants who are very close to the subject. This was another interesting theme to introduce to the discussion and raises the question regarding how or if social work faculty are being trained to deliver Indigenous content. Further, it calls into question the methods by which Indigenous content is being delivered. It has already been discussed that Indigenous content is often not treated as equally valid or delivered with care, so what methods are faculty using to deliver this content and who is giving them permission to deliver the content in such a way? These concepts will be elaborated on in the suggestions section.

I completed my Bachelor of Social Work at Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie. Strictly for contextual purposes, the university is situated on the same ground and utilizes a building that was formally Shingwauk Indian Residential School. This was a very powerful place to receive my education as an Indigenous person, as it was for many other Indigenous academics. While in the BSW program I completed a class titled social work in "Northern and Rural Communities." In one of the classes we met in the auditorium of Shingwauk Residential School to complete the blanket exercise (an exercise that guides participants through the history of Canada in relation to Indigenous peoples). A week prior to the class Indigenous students were informed of what content would be covered in the following class and were allowed to be excused from it if we chose. Before starting the exercise, the professor, a non-Indigenous white woman, took time to socially locate herself in the context of Canada, Indigenous peoples and the

history of colonization, and explained why the exercise was being done. Each student also introduced themselves in relation to this content. There was also an elder present for the activity. Further, we had a class discussion before and after about the exercise and completing it in the site of a former Residential School. Finally, the exercise itself was made more specific to the experience of Indigenous people near and around Sault Ste. Marie. There were many steps taken to host one class lecture looking at a brief history of Indigenous people. I have never attended another course, or lecture more powerful where students were pushed out of their comfort zones and truly confronted with the history of Canada. I have never attended a program where this level of care was placed on the holistic safety of Indigenous students and ensuring the content justifies Indigenous identity and experience.

The participants felt that the typical way social work curriculum engages with Indigenous identity paints a picture of defeat and that Indigenous people have not initiated processes of healing. This concept was critical to acknowledge because it speaks to the ways in which Indigenous identity currently interacts with social work curriculum. Implications or suggestions of this interaction will be discussed later in this paper.

Shoots and Runners V:

Giving Indigenous content space

“There was a lack of indigenous teachings for sure in the first few years, but [eventually] we got to start picking our own courses...”(Stacy).

One of the first themes that arose early in the discussion regarding suggestions to better represent Indigenous identity and experiences is to see that Indigenous courses are incorporated into program structures as mandatory (rather than elective) classes. While the diversification of curriculum needs to be expanded to better represent many different knowledges, experiences and identities, within the context of Canada and the history with Indigenous peoples it is especially

critical and would better promote reconciliation within the social work profession. This concept was frequently discussed during the learning circle as the participants felt that Indigenous perspectives were often treated as secondary information and merely tagged onto the main content lecture which resulted in it not being represented in a truthful or equitable way. Many social work programs promote “Indigenization” and yet this process of drastically changing the core structure of the content becomes a mere afterthought or reduced to elective courses.

I often describe it as a sticky note thought, that at the end of the lecture the professor tags on a quick thought about Indigenous people before the class lecture wraps up. This approach, aside from being lazy and ingenuine, also neglects to give an appropriate amount of space to fully explain Indigenous perspectives, knowledge and the complicated history. In my own classes that I teach, I ensure that when I am incorporating Indigenous content into a class lecture that there is ample time and space allotted to ensure as much discussion and teaching can happen as needed. Further, the content is presented in a way that gives it equal value compared to Western content.

I have taken many classes where Indigenous content that is incorporated into lectures is frequently presented as knowledge that is only helpful for Indigenous peoples. For example, the participants in this study frequently discussed the importance of including holistic perspectives into course curriculum as well as their own social work practice. However, neither participant discussed using this concept exclusively with Indigenous peoples. Simply put, it was identified that many Indigenous perspectives can be incorporated and used in an appropriate way with many different demographics. Ultimately the Medicine Wheel Teachings and holistic perspectives express the importance of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island are not the only people who would benefit from this approach of wellbeing: anybody would find benefit in this approach. Yet, when Indigenous

knowledge is presented in classes it is often seen as something that only Indigenous people would benefit from.

Onboarding processes for Indigenous staff:

“I think that way that they're teaching, what they're holding up[in] the circle, the medicine wheel, while teaching us to hate each other or to create these hierarchies of suffering and victimhood and identity... is against the teachings. Or like it's just it's not honoring them I don't wanna say it's not honoring. I mean it's certainly not honoring the, the treaties of the territory...” (Stacy).

The participants both identified that social work programs need to place a higher priority in hiring and retaining Indigenous faculty members. This discussion raised questions about what protocols programs have put in place to hire, train and retain Indigenous faculty members. Looking at the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) calls to action there is a complete roadmap on ways to improve curriculum and Indigenous faculty/student experience. Further, this is really a natural extension of “equal opportunity” hiring programs that many workplaces offer. In a profession such as social work there should be meaningful action and extra care and thought put into hiring Indigenous faculty. There needs to be a deeper reason than simply hiring Indigenous staff for the sake of diversity. It has already been discussed that it was frustrating and difficult for the participants of this study to attend programs where there was minimal to no Indigenous content. Further, it was also frustrating to hear this content misrepresented and poorly delivered by a non-Indigenous professor.

My tenure as a faculty member at Seneca College has been pleasant as coworkers, directors/coordinators and students have been very receptive to my approach in incorporating Indigenous content, and patient as I learned to be a college professor. The participants expressed concern regarding social work programs actually being able to ensure the holistic safety of

Indigenous faculty while simultaneously ensuring Indigenous faculty members are able to deliver Indigenized curriculum in the classroom setting. Both participants discussed that they have seen issues between Indigenous faculty when students or non-Indigenous faculty are not receptive to Indigenous content or perspectives. When this happens, it results in further traumatization and reinforces the notion that universities are not spaces that welcome Indigenous people.

From this vantage point, the hiring of Indigenous faculty would be of significant value. As Indigenous people we are more than capable of representing ourselves and delivering meaningful Indigenized curriculum. However, there is still a problem in this approach which reinforces the need for the hiring to be much more meaningful than filling a check box for an Indigenous teacher with Indigenous knowledge. To simply hire an Indigenous faculty member and have them exclusively deliver Indigenous content is potentially dangerous as it could promote a cycle of re-traumatization. Indigenous history is fraught with traumatic periods and then periods of healing. To subject an Indigenous faculty member to teaching this over and over would be reckless and harmful to do. Because of this there must be a deeper, more emphatic reason to hire an Indigenous faculty outside of not having the non-Indigenous faculty delivering curriculum that reminds them of their implications in the colonization of Indigenous people.

Understanding the significance of hiring Indigenous faculty is to also understand why curriculum needs to be changed. Both of these tasks need to be completed for either to make a difference. Effectively implementing these two tasks would see the interaction between Indigenous identity and curriculum improve as Indigenous curriculum would be created in a caring way from the people that it will represent.

Shoots and Runners VI:

Inherent restrictions of Western institutions

“It's something you said too it's like it's a triggering place due to that blood memory being in somewhere like here [post-secondary institution] ...” (Stacy).

Another suggestion that was raised throughout the discussion was that Western colleges and universities are inherently oppressive and traumatic spaces for Indigenous peoples. As previously discussed, the curriculum of programs is designed by non-Indigenous faculty and implemented in a prescribed way and this naturally inhibits Indigenous identity and knowledge. This in some ways carries on the legacy of Residential Schools as it places limitations and demeans Indigenous perspectives. Both participants identified and very fervently discussed their experiences as they have felt that their perspectives are not given the same value as Western knowledge or are silenced as a result of other students in their classes promoting their perspectives and these constantly taking priority over Indigenous perspectives.

Through this discussion it became apparent that Western academic spaces have an inherent nature to them that is immediately traumatizing for Indigenous academics. However, what is interesting is that this experience of trauma varied depending on the institution the participant attended. For me as well, the experience of being marginalized is always present but shifts in proximity depending on the curriculum and the professor's skills in facilitating class discussions. In this study, both participants identified good and bad experiences during their time in social work programs. The degree in which the experience was good or bad largely shifted on a spectrum and was never a black and white experience.

What is critical about this implication is that although Western academic institutions have inherent qualities that are naturally oppressive, limiting and traumatizing to Indigenous peoples, they are not *exclusively* these things but rather fall onto a spectrum. I believe that these components merely fall onto the university and the schools of social work to ensure programs curriculum is being created in a way that lends its time and space to appropriately discuss and

represent Indigenous identity and experiences. Faculty members must also treat the content with respect and acknowledge their proximity to the content and ensure that other students are also doing so.

6: Implications: Dissemination of the Fruit (making jam)

The goal of this research was look at social work curriculum delivery to understand if it appropriately engages Indigenous identity and experience. While programs cannot necessarily represent all facets of Indigenous identity, they can do more work around better representing certain components of it. Some of these concepts have been discussed in the previous section but will be built upon to cover a larger spectrum.

Community connectivity

The first implication that arises through discussions is that social work programs need to assess what community connectivity they have to local Indigenous peoples to be representing their identity and knowledge to any degree. Tuck and Yang (2014) discuss how many Indigenous people are leery to have any research done in their communities because so much research has been completed in the past and through this knowledge and identity have been partially robbed from communities.

It would also encourage stronger ties to local Indigenous communities which means curriculum would be stronger and more focussed. Often, social work curriculum regarding Indigenous experiences and identity is problematic and confusing as dozens of different Indigenous nation's experiences and traditions are being loosely represented but not fully explained or justified. Building stronger connections to local Indigenous groups means that content will be more specific to what nations are largely represented in an area which in turn would mean they are being represented in a truer manner. This would also guarantee that programs are receiving permission to even represent Indigenous identity and experiences. There is also the reality of urban verses rural experience. Both participants are from urban settings which is why the literature review maintained a focus on urban Indigenous identity as well. This type of community building that I am discussing would be more appropriate in representing the

localized experiences of Indigenous people and how identity is maintained even in urban environments.

I believe social work programs should be engaging in community connections and continually seek consent to represent Indigenous content. This would not only open up connections in communities which would be reciprocal in nature as social work curriculum would be stronger but also Indigenous peoples would have less work to do in appropriate identity representation. Another critical component of this approach would be making programs more accountable to the communities in which they are positioned. As a front-line social worker, I am constantly being held accountable to multiple different parties, and for good reason. I am accountable to the service user and/or their families, I am accountable to the communities that I practice in through assessment of my ability to perform in a way that will encourage healing, I am accountable to every school program I have graduated from, I am accountable to any professional accreditation bodies and their standards, I am accountable to governing legislature municipally, provincially and federal and finally I am accountable to the agency and their mandates. As an Indigenous worker there is even heightened degrees of community accountability as well. So, this raises the question as to why schools of social work are not holding themselves up to these same levels of accountability with the communities that they function in.

Acknowledgement of social works implications in colonization

The second suggestion is that social work programs needs to acknowledge wrong doings before moving forward with any other processes of decolonization. Social work as a profession is intensely implicated in the destruction of Indigenous people from Residential Schools, 60's Scoop and the Millennial Scoop (Alston-O'Connor, 2010). Further, there is still a lot of work to do in appropriately designing services to be delivered in an inclusive and decolonized manner.

Many of these wrongdoings cannot be changed or forgotten, however social work can position itself as an accomplice in the healing process Indigenous people are working towards.

Schools of social work need to take up more space and make decolonization a higher priority. Although many people agree that public apologies like the one former Prime Minister Stephan Harper gave in 2008 are completely meaningless without action to follow it up (Barrera, 2015), it is nonetheless a good place to begin. In my research, I have found few schools or regulatory bodies that have publicly acknowledged, apologized and continue to be accountable for social work's role in the trauma that Indigenous communities have faced. To begin any process of decolonization it would be imperative that there is an acknowledgement and apology so that a relationship can be strengthened or restored.

While I was at Algoma University, a school located on the former site of Shingwauk Residential School, the realities of what that history caused is continually acknowledged and incorporated into social work curriculum (and in many other programs for that matter). Further, the institute has put protocols in place to continue researching and learning about this history and to also honour the original peoples and Chief Shingwauk's original vision of a "Teaching Lodge" ('Special Mission', n.d.). Compare this to my present school, Ryerson which has only recently started this reconciliation work as an institution and has used weak justifications for delaying this work rather than admitting to rejecting the need for the work to happen; Ryerson has attempted to distance itself from its founder rather than state that the work that Egerton did has done more harm than good; and finally not display any signs of humility and respect for the level of damage the University has caused through its association with Egerton (O'neil-Green & Dallaire, 2016). Further, definitive signs of reconciliation are used only by certain professors and through my experience in the program, has not been incorporated thoroughly throughout every course.

Schools of social work need to be leading by example in actualizing processes of decolonization for their student bodies. You cannot teach students a decolonized practice through a colonized curriculum. It was also suggested through the discussions that faculty should be better trained in understanding Indigenous content before attempting to deliver the curriculum. Having a higher degree of understanding and being introspective enough to understand one's social location in relation to Indigenous experience was viewed as imperative. Social work programs need to be putting in the work to ensure the students that are leaving their programs fully understanding the history, the present and what the future holds for healing with regard to Indigenous people. Appropriately going through this process will help to ensure Indigenous students are not having to do this in the classrooms themselves and that their identities will be better represented.

Indigenizing curriculum

The third suggestion is that social work programs implement a required Indigenous studies course that is created in collaboration with Indigenous peoples. This does not refer to hiring a Master or PhD level professor to do this work but rather use connections with community to create a course that the *community itself* would be able to say represents them. Indigenous identity and knowledge cannot be fully captured or taught in current educational institutes, so it is critical that programs acknowledge that appropriate professors are not just ideally Indigenous but also cognizant and knowledgeable in their community and culture, as well as the community they are teaching in. This task would only be able to be completed if a social work program has created a relationship with local Indigenous communities. Further, this level of community engagement should still be accomplished if an Indigenous faculty member is brought in to develop the course. As an Anishinaabe person I do not represent all Indigenous

people of Turtle Island, or even locally in Toronto for that matter and neither can any other singular faculty member.

For the course to appropriately represent Indigenous identity it needs to be created with local Indigenous people. However, it needs to be open enough to change as Indigenous identity naturally changes and be created in a way that is not stagnant but shifts as new information is adopted. What was identified through the discussion with the participants of this study was that when Indigenous identity is discussed it is very historical and lacks contemporary relevance. An Indigenous studies course needs to leave behind the shackles of anthropological approaches and utilize the narrative, story-telling and first-voice pedagogical approaches that separate social work practice from other professions. Further, this course needs to not focus on any one component of Indigenous identity but rather be strategic in content that is included. The reality is that it would need to cover pre-contact history, early contact, treaties, Residential Schools, 60's/Millennial Scoop, and modern incidents like Ipperwash, the Oka Crisis and Standing Rock. However, it would also be imperative to focus on healing components that Indigenous people have always used or have used in recent years. Simply put, it would be a tremendous amount of content that would have to be covered. However, as the participants identified, and my experience in front-line social work revealed, it has been much more destructive to have thousands of social workers graduate every year and not know this information because programs either had no Indigenous studies class or they did not have an effective course that appropriately grasped the content.

For this reason, I believe it is important for a program to acknowledge if they will be developing an Indigenous studies courses or *courses*. As previously stated, there is a lot of content that would need to be covered and this would require a specific course, though other courses curriculum should include Indigenous content to promote a fuller learning experience.

However, a program may need to consider multiple courses to fully capture Indigenous identity, history and healing.

Hiring Indigenous faculty

Another suggestion that became apparent in the discussions was that it would be important for programs to hire Indigenous faculty members. Hiring Indigenous faculty is a natural extension of inclusive hiring practices that many institutions employ. However, Indigenous faculty can be easily used as tokens in any workforce and social work programs should be especially cognizant of this. Hiring an Indigenous faculty member can be easily used to remove guilt from non-Indigenous faculty regarding their implications in colonization. Further, simply hiring an Indigenous faculty member to deliver curriculum in this manner allows Western institutions to maintain power over knowledge, which was identified by Sue and Stacy as problematic and demeaning. Social work programs hiring Indigenous faculty should approach it with care and an established reason to bring Indigenous members into the school. More importantly in social work, it is critical to raise the voices of Indigenous peoples as we can better represent our experiences, healing and identity compared to non-Indigenous faculty. Having Indigenous faculty should be for better reasons than merely promoting diversity in teaching delivery in a social work program.

It is more complicated than merely hiring a qualified Indigenous person into a faculty position. This is the route that is often taken as programs hire an Indigenous person to a position then expect content and curriculum change with little direction as to how to appropriately update Indigenous curriculum. Even worse, sometimes an Indigenous faculty member is hired with no intentionality outside of having an appearance of diversity. If Indigenous faculty are going to be hired there are a few components that need to be considered.

First, who is the faculty member that is being hired? Are they representative of the local Indigenous population and if not, what connection do they have to the region? Further, are they aware of their community's teachings and protocol? Understanding this is critical as there are many people who recently 'learned' about their great, great grandmother who was an Indian princess from Ancestry.ca. Indigenous identity and connectivity go beyond flimsy concepts like blood quantum and family stories and delves into deeper realms of connectivity, community and teachings.

Second, what is the reasoning for the program to hire this faculty member? A program should have an established trajectory or plan that indicates what role Indigenous faculty will fulfill in the program and what changes will occur during the faculty member's tenure in the program. However, it is also important to acknowledge that Indigenous faculty members will be able to offer supports and encouragement to Indigenous students on a different level than non-Indigenous faculty. I believe that there is a lot of opportunity to rethink the roles that faculty play in students' lives and looking at Indigenous perspectives on teaching and community would be a template for the impact Indigenous professors can have on Indigenous students, and non-Indigenous students for that matter. For example, during my time in college I spent a lot of time reflecting while writing assignments and this helped shaped who as I am as an Indigenous person. I am a very introverted person, so this framework of self-discovery worked for me. However, as one of the participants noted in this study, their path in understanding and remembering their Indigeneity has been *lonely*. Indigenous faculty could be guides for Indigenous students in finding their identity.

Third, a program should have adequate and appropriate supports in place to ensure the onboarding and long-term wellbeing of Indigenous faculty members. This concept needs to go

beyond traditional views of onboarding and consider historical implications and the current degree of trauma that Indigenous people face in settler institutions.

Use of space to promote Indigenous content

Another suggestion that was reflective of the literature was the use of space, more specifically how space can be reflective and accommodating of cultural representation (Hadjiyanni & Helle, 2008). While Hadjiyanni and Helle, (2008) are specifically looking at how homes reflect the identity and culture of Indigenous occupants, the concept can carry over to educational institutions. It has already been thoroughly discussed how Western institutions are inherently oppressive, limiting and traumatic towards Indigenous culture, identity and experiences. However, this does not mean that space cannot be rearranged in a way that would see Indigenous peoples thrive while also bolstering the learning of non-Indigenous students.

In Hadjiyanni and Helle's, (2008) paper they discuss how families of mixed ethnicities have different ways to accommodate different identities, whether through total segregation or having reflections of different identities on display. Social work classrooms can use a similar technique in addressing the limiting structure of classrooms. Most universities have access to some green space, so programs need to make use of it. Most institutions have specific Indigenous spaces on campus which should be utilized to the fullest capacity. Further, using teaching methods such as circles or discussions serve as ways to disrupt typical class structures and power dynamics. This being said, simply setting up a circle is not enough but as Kanu (2007) and Freeman (2008) discussed it is about deep philosophical and pedagogical changes that make the difference.

Resistance

Another theme that arose from discussions was that Indigenous identity is heavily tied to themes of resistance. On the interconnectedness of Indigenous identity and resistance Simpson

(2011), makes this connection: “They resisted by simply surviving and being alive. They resisted by holding onto their stories” (p.15). The simple act of surviving is imperative to the resistance of a colonial state bent on assimilating Indigenous culture, beliefs and identity. This theme becomes another major cornerstone to Indigenous identity. It seems that there is a component of survival that has become ingrained into Indigenous identity, but it feels like an extension or product of the identity.

My grandmother used to tell me that when she was a little girl, life was hard, and that life has always been hard for our people and survival was just a part of what made us Ojibway. Listening to my participants’ stories it becomes painfully apparent that life is still hard for our people, and that survival is still a part of who we are but that the circumstances to survive have changed dramatically. My grandmother was speaking of times of hunting, fishing and gathering in the face of changing seasons and a rapidly changing world. Now we see survival in a sense of reclaiming language and culture, reclaiming and protecting land, teachings as well as maintaining balance in a world that has continued to change every day. Further, the social issues that Indigenous people face have only become more complicated and interwoven into a broken system that has benefited a colonial state. We see crises like the Murdered & Missing Indigenous Women, Girls & Two-Spirit (MMIWG2S), poor drinking water, high rates of suicide and mental health and Indigenous men being over represented in prisons. Indeed, the terms of survival have changed but the resistance to surrender has not changed.

There are a lot of discussions that look at how resilient Indigenous people have been historically and continue to be in the face of colonization. Although I do agree we have been resilient I think a more critical part of our identity is that we have been more *resistant* than we have been *resilient*. Resilience would suggest that Indigenous peoples have been complacent during the process of colonization whereas resistance speaks to another narrative where

Indigenous people have not only survived but have also somehow thrived in a land that has been distorted and twisted against its original occupants. Resistance has always been a part of our identity and this has helped shape our survival historically and has continued to inform the way we have survived in recent years.

There is a natural tension between Western institutions and Indigenous identity because of this theme of resistance. An area that social work programs can do work around is supporting Indigenous students in their resistance of a colonial state. This may seem obvious but the themes that were discussed during the learning circle and this paper ultimately lead back to Indigenous identity and the ways it is tied to resistance. To see Indigenous students thrive in academic settings is resistance; to see narratives being rewritten because curriculum is engaging with Indigenous identity in an appropriate way is resistance; to see Indigenous communities having control over how their identity is represented is resistance.

7: Limitations of study

It is critical to acknowledge limitations in this study. First, it is imperative that I acknowledge that the focus of this study is on the experiences of Indigenous people who trace their ancestry to Turtle Island (First Nation, Inuit and Metis). The reason for this is for my own personal self-exploration and my ancestral background. It is not to demean, limit or inhibit the struggles of other populations like Black, or other racialized communities, people living with disability and LGBTQ2S+ people in their struggles for recognition and appropriate identity representation (nor do I mean to suggest that any of these groups are not also populated by Indigenous peoples). This study is not meant to take away space or focus from these struggles but to add to the dialogue in regard to Indigenous issues and needs surrounding experiences and identity representation.

Another limitation that is critical to acknowledge is the small number of participants. This decision was made because of the need to focus on the narratives of Indigenous participants rather than utilize quantitative approaches. However, this is still a limitation in this study as it only implicates a small number of experiences of Indigenous academics in social work programs. It is still however, an indication of the experiences of these two Indigenous academics and how their identity has been engaged through social work curriculum delivery.

8: Conclusion: Dissemination of the fruit (We made jam)

Many Indigenous people are entering into helping professions for a variety of reasons. Unfortunately, many of these programs do not have adequate supports or appropriate curriculum to properly engage Indigenous identity which can result in difficult experiences for Indigenous academics in these programs. This subject is very personal to me as I am Anishinaabe and have attended multiple post-secondary institutions to obtain education in human services and my experience has varied depending on the program. This subject is close to my heart because of my ethnic background, my experience as a student in post-secondary institutions and my experience as a part-time faculty member at Seneca College in the Child and Youth Care program. This research engaged in community and I had a discussion with other Indigenous academics to understand their experiences in social work programs.

This research process started by looking at literature that discusses Indigenous identity. I decided to use a multitude of approaches and frameworks to get an understanding of what assumptions exist regarding Indigenous identity. It is critical to note that regardless of what content was found during this literature search I would be relying most on teachings regarding the Medicine Wheel and the participant's perspectives and teachings on identity. For the most part the content that was found during the literature search complemented what features of Indigenous identity that the participants also highlighted. Themes of community, connection to land and direct ancestry arose in the literature and in the conversation with participants.

What becomes more apparent was the perspectives that the literature took in finding a version of Indigenous identity. Many of the articles used poorly delivered Western techniques like surveys to establish a mild understanding of identity. Further, some of these research studies seemed to have a definition in mind and created questions that promoted that concept. It seemed that these definitions of Indigenous identity were confined to what concepts Western approaches

needed to affirm its assumptions. Studies that utilized a narrative approach were much more successful in grasping at larger concepts of identity. Further, studies that used narrative approaches and Indigenous frameworks captured larger concepts of Indigeneity.

There was not much literature that discussed Indigenous experiences in human service programs. It was largely found that despite the inclusion of Indigenous themed content the structure of the institution and overarching curriculum limited the effectiveness and meaning of Indigenous knowledge. However, it was identified that when Indigenous content was presented meaningfully, and the philosophical approach of the course was altered to allow for the content students were more receptive and excelled (Kanu, 2007; Freeman, 2008).

In this study I used Anishinaabe teachings regarding strawberries and strawberry picking as a framework and methodological approach. Strawberry teachings largely formed my approach in social work, so I felt it compelling to use the teachings in this study as the concepts are interchangeable when used appropriately. The concept of the strawberry and the associated teachings was used as a model to follow during the research process. Strawberry picking became the template in which the research process followed which includes: gathering supplies, finding a spot to pick, collecting berries and finally dissemination of the fruit. Utilizing this framework ensured that I followed Anishinaabe values and incorporated these perspectives into the research process.

I completed a learning circle with two Indigenous academics currently completing their Master of Social Work in Toronto. The participants were asked questions that largely revolved around their perspectives of Indigenous identity and representation of this identity in social work programs. Further, we discussed their experiences attending social work programs and discussed what social work programs could do to improve Indigenous identity representation and

experiences in programs. This learning circle was completed following Anishinaabe protocol and tobacco ties were given to the participants in exchange for their knowledge.

There were major implications that arose through the discussions as to changes social works programs should implement to better represent Indigenous identity and experiences of students. First it was discussed that Indigenous content should be provided by local Indigenous communities and social work programs should build stronger ties to these communities. Second, social work programs should internally and externally acknowledge the destructive past social work has waged against Indigenous people. Third, social work programs should implement required Indigenous studies curriculum and specific course(s). Fourth, Indigenous faculty should be hired and appropriately trained and have supports in place. Fifth, social work faculty need to receive better or have required training regarding concepts of decolonization, cultural safety, historical components and Indigenous perspectives. Social work programs need to consider the implications of temporal space and how this can better represent Indigenous experience and identity if used correctly. Finally, these themes were all drawn together as I discussed the implications of Indigenous identity being tied to resistance.

This research is a product of what focus I have had during my tenure as an academic, my personal practice style, my internal reflections, and as a professor at Seneca College. It has been a significant learning experience to look at concepts of Indigeneity and identity as well as other Indigenous experiences in social work programs. Ultimately, I feel that programs have started the work to change for the better but lack dedication and visceral understanding of larger concepts of Indigeneity. For this reason, programs focus on historical traumas from an innocent and detached position but do not acknowledge individualistic connections to processes of colonization. As an Indigenous academic I have felt everything from frustration, contentment and excitement depending on the program and faculty members' ability to grapple with

Indigenous themes. However, social workers continue to be trained and engaged with Indigenous peoples so the time to have proper identity representation has long passed. Social work programs no longer have valid excuses for delaying or not implementing curriculum and program structures that will no longer continue mistreating and misrepresenting Indigenous people.

Berry picking can be done simply and without concern for the potential negative effects improper picking can cause. This research could also have been done simply but it was important to honour the stories of the two Indigenous academics who participated and also honour the memory of those who have been negatively affected through social work's history. In the same way that strawberries play a critical role in nature, providing food and ground coverage, so too should social work should be playing a meaningful role in the journey towards reconciliation through innovative education that embraces many different knowledges and uses experiential perspectives so that non-Indigenous social workers are educated properly, and Indigenous social workers are able to be trained to engage in community healing, resist with our communities and not traumatized through the process of education.

*"But I like having that space [to] realize that even the people who are doing the
perpetrating have their own stuff and their stories, and more stories beneath the turtles
all the way down..." (Stacy).*

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