EXPLORATION IN UNDERSTANDING AN INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEW

A Thesis
Submitted to the Department of Psychology
In Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
In
Psychology
University of Regina
By
Jaezila Crittenden
Regina, Saskatchewan
April, 2019

© 2019: J. Crittenden
To mending,
nurturing,
and embracing,
all my relations.
Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Jaime Williams, for your inspirational encouragement, support, and openness as I maneuvered through this experience. I’d also like to give a huge thank you to my Husband, for your never-ending support, hand holding, and believing in me through this project and always. Also, to the individuals who were willing to listen to my story and share their own, that ensured the vitality of this project to flow, I thank you deeply. To my readers, as I humbly and gratefully stand upon the beautiful Treaty 4 lands I call home, I would like to thank you for listening to the story of my journey. hay hay!
Abstract

With motivations of indigenization and reconciliation in mind, I contemplated my ability, as a non-Indigenous individual, to understand an Indigenous worldview, pertaining specifically to the Indigenous culture of Treaty 4 lands. Initially, I used qualitative approaches of ethnography and participant observation to procure knowledge through literature and experiential happenings pertaining to Indigenous culture, which I reflected in field journal entries. I further sought to conduct interviews with Indigenous people, who are deeply familiar with their culture using an interpretive phenomenological perspective. However, my journey soon revealed the need for a different approach, one that relied on Indigenous methodologies, specifically conversational method and self-location. The conversational method, involving the gathering of knowledge through the tradition of oral storytelling, and self-location, the situating of self and acknowledgement of how personal experiences influence the lens of interpretation, allowed me to approach individuals in a relational manner that permitted a space for protocol, sacred content, and vital respect to emerge (Kovach, 2010). Similar to research narratives shared by other non-Indigenous researchers, I learned that self-involvement is intimately required in revealing a personal understanding of an Indigenous worldview and Indigenous traditions can provide a passage for those curious, in formalizing connections of sacred appreciation and relation to the land. Moreover, engaging with Indigenous knowledge justifiably led me to recognize the need for appropriate methodologies within my research that respectfully enable the existential component of spirituality to be reflected and honoured in the emergence of cultural practices of said worldview.

Keywords: Indigenous worldview, Indigenous methodology, reconciliation
Exploration in Understanding an Indigenous Worldview

Stories move in circles. They don’t move in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in circles. There are stories inside stories and stories between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is the getting lost. And when you’re lost, you start to look around and to listen (Metzger, 1992, p. 49)

I remember feeling completely lost when I accepted that I needed to abandon my originally proposed research methods. Metaphorically, it was as if I had been knocked off the clear, safe, manicured, and seemingly deep path I was traveling on. Efficiently and naively, I trudged along the path believing it would lead me exactly to what I thought I was looking for. However, all of a sudden, I found myself tumbling down a forest wall into the depths of an environment I had never known before. I tried to scamper up the forest wall to the path, but part of me knew there was no way I could go back. The beginning of this research grew from the seeds of process being rooted in an exploration, and lo and behold, I found myself lost in the forest, accepting that being lost was part of the process. I imagined a voice say, “This is what you asked for,” and I smiled as I realized that the path of Western methods I was traveling on was keeping me from, or perhaps was unable, to hold the space for the phenomenal components of an Indigenous worldview that I was questioning. Feeling defeated, I sat down and took a look around. The surroundings were beautiful and I could feel small fragments of light dance on my skin. I took in a breath and accepted that maybe this was exactly where I needed to be. Then the words of a Traditional Knowledge Keeper I had been meeting with filled my head, “You need to figure out why you are doing this research and stick to it or it won’t work.”
Part of me knew that her words were true and another part began to panic. I did not know why I sought out to explore an Indigenous worldview, other than every cell in my body felt as if it was being called to learn about it. I had no idea how to explain the rising vocation I felt and in a way that would fit into the Western research methodologies I had proposed. I was unaware of any other way then what I had studied thus far in psychological research methods courses at the University of Regina. I had no idea what I was getting myself into when I decided I wanted to research an Indigenous worldview, pertaining more specifically to the views that exist on Treaty 4 lands (e.g. Cree, Saulteaux, and Assiniboine). I believed I was becoming to understand why there was a time when psychologists discouraged researchers investigating ethnic topics (Sue, 1994). The past views of ethnic research were said to deal with “populations”, rather than, “phenomenon”, and were seen as, “not really science or psychology because ethnic investigators were often polemical or interdisciplinary in approach” (Sue, 1994). Stemming out of the past stigmas of phenomenal research of cultural topics, I hope this thesis contributes to the necessity of research to be explored and deepened by adding to psychological body of knowledge. The intentions behind this thesis are to share the story of my journey reflecting insights into experiencing and learning about an Indigenous worldview. This involved a journey of honouring my past memories on the prairie lands of Saskatchewan, and redeveloping and nurturing my relations to those lands.

**Little girl on the prairie.** I used to jump from stone to stone of an abandoned tipi ring in one of our family’s farm fields and my imagination created visions of Aboriginal tribes nestled in-between the gradual unfolding hills. I used to scramble up a buffalo rubbing stone with the surrounding earth still drummed down from their weight and I imagined those majestic creatures going around and round trying to satisfy their back itch. I used
to stand in the Saskatoon berry patch with sun-warmed skin and little fingers painted purple and imagine First Nations women filling natural fiber baskets and small children sneaking juicy pomes at their hips. These small fragments that exist in my memory and live in the impressions of my family’s farmland are a part of my being and personal story. However, these fragments are not my own. These fragments are strands of history that are forever tethered to the land but when I’ve tried to grasp these strands they slip through my hands. It’s as if a certain knowledge or paradigm is required and acts as permission for me to possibly hold on to their truths.

**Spring**

**Red**

In April of 2018, I met with my psychology honours supervisor, to discuss any possible research ideas I had and to get a feel of the direction we would like to head. She told me that the next time we meet to present her with three populations I was interested in working with within a qualitative research frame. The day before we met I discovered I would have to take two Cree language courses over the summer to fulfill my degree requirements. This news was followed by my stepson getting off the bus with a children’s Cree language book he had signed out of the library. I smiled and acknowledged the strange coincidence as I told my stepson that perhaps one day I would be able to read that book to him. The next day I met again with my supervisor, and as I shared with her the population interests I had, the sound of First Nations drumming music began to faintly fill her office, wafting in from elsewhere on campus. “You know,” I said, “The strangest thing happened to me yesterday,” as I shared with her the Cree language coincidence, “…and I’ve always been interested in Indigenous culture.” This is how my inquest into exploring an Indigenous worldview began as she suggested, “I think you should follow your curiosities.”
After articulating the pages of an ethics application, we moulded my curiosities into a framework with form and context. With great help and encouragement from my supervisor, we comprised a study involving exploratory moments and experiences to uncover the possibilities of how a non-Indigenous individual can come to understand, if at all, the componential phenomenon that exist within an Indigenous worldview. The study was set up for myself as an undergraduate psychology researcher, to explores the experiences or steps necessary in arriving at a place to see (or begin to see) through the lens of an Indigenous worldview.

Although examples exist, uncovering projects that involve an individual’s personal insights as they experienced, and not simply observed, the epistemology of North American Indigenous cultures, did not come easily. Even more challenging, was figuring out how to respectfully learn and then incorporate proper cultural protocols into the research when necessary or being aware of appropriate methodologies that would support such a study. Some researchers suggest go as far to say, “Few books have been written about Indian and Native psychology and curriculum and research themes in psychology are nearly devoid of content dealing with Indian and Native topics” (Trimble et al., 2009). Truthfully, I often found myself struggling along my yearlong research journey and I wish there was a more defined and reachable research body I could have accessed before beginning the project. However, as I will later share, my journey required an uncovering of self with what I was learning and I believe it was quintessential in deepening my understanding of content that I did have access and exposure to.

Searching for arrowheads. During seeding time on the farm, my siblings and I would beg to ride in the tractor alongside our grandfather while he plowed the fields. After becoming annoyed by our endless questions and bickering, he would tell us to go look for arrowheads in the freshly worked dirt. I remember endlessly lumbering through the
sifting black soil with my head cranked down so low my neck would ache. I was old enough to know that the chances of finding an arrowhead were slim and the smirk on my grandfather’s face confirmed this. However, I also knew my grandpa had collected many arrowheads and stone mauls over the years that were left behind by the land’s First Peoples. My dad once told me that grandpa had eyes like a hawk for those sorts of things. I loved my grandpa and wanted to be just like him so I took my searching seriously. I have yet to find any stone tools but I’ve accepted that his collection of stones is the result of decades sitting up on a perch in a tractor and recognizing the right shape at the right time. His special skill developed over a lifetime of slow-moving patience, knowing what to recognize, and allowing it to appear without searching.

I believed, and still do, that it would be of use for myself, as a non-Indigenous individual, as an undergraduate psychology student, as a resident of Canada, as a mother, an artist, an individual, to understand at a deeper level the Indigenous People of the community I live in. Just as I searched for arrow heads in the rows of plowed soil, I contemplated what the best way for me to explore comprehension of an Indigenous worldview would be. I asked, how do I even begin in approaching this journey? I wondered if I should actively search or patiently wait and allow the process to reveal itself. I pondered if I would even recognize it if it was right in front of me. I deliberated if it would take a lifetime for me to understand like my grandfather’s developed knack for finding stone tools. I also worried that, as a non-Aboriginal individual, my efforts would be viewed as privilege, metaphorical to being perched on a tractor. My intentions, as I was steadily working and seeding the soil, have the potential to make something grow. However, even though my intentions were and are pure, I was not positive of the factors needed for the crop to grow.
**Then Summer**

**Worldview.** I soon discovered the complexity associated with inquiry into the ontological groundwork of a worldview. Leroy Little Bear (2000) explains that, “Any individual within a culture is going to have his or her own personal interpretation of collective cultural code: however, the individual’s worldview has its roots in the culture – that is, in the society’s shared philosophy, values and customs.” Specifically, an Indigenous worldview emerges from an acuity of all creation being related to the circular phases of life; involving no beginning or end (Getty, 2010). Duran and Duran (2000) explain an Indigenous worldview as

A systemic approach to being in the world that can best be categorized as process thinking, as opposed to the content thinking found in Western worldview. Process thinking is best described as more action and “eventing” approach to life versus a world of subject/object relationships (p. 91)

In many ways the literature plays with the interconnection of realization through comparing the Western worldview to an Indigenous worldview. Some key juxtaposing ideas involve such things as a temporal approach to time. Westerners view time in linear temporal order, whereas most Indigenous Peoples’ gestation of time approach is spatial (Duran & Duran, 1995). Spatial thinking refers to viewing experiences as extensions of the environment where they took place compared to temporal thinking involving the concept of a beginning and end (Duran & Duran, 1995). One of the biggest juxtaposing factors is that of non-compartmentalization of experience (Duran & Duran, 1995). In Western experience it appears routine to separate the components of mind, body, and spirit, whereas in an Indigenous worldview this is an alien concept (Duran & Duran, 1995). It appeared for myself to understand
an Indigenous worldview, just as much personal awareness is needed to perceive a composed epistemology of a Western worldview.

One of the important techniques I have become aware of and practice in my everyday life is the concept of relation. Shawn Wilson is an Opaskwayak Cree and known for his work involving Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies and demonstrating the balance between “Indigenous and academic worlds” (Wilson, 2008). Wilson (2001) shares in his article, *What is an Indigenous Research Methodology*,

One major difference between the dominant paradigms and an Indigenous paradigm is that all the dominant paradigms build on the fundamental belief that knowledge is an individual entity: the researcher is an individual in search of knowledge, knowledge is something that is gained, and therefore knowledge may be owned by an individual. An indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all of creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, not just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation. It is with the cosmos, it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge (p. 176-177).

*Orange*

When I first began to look for literature regarding an Indigenous worldview, it did not come easily. Such explanations for this occurrence array from, “ethnocentrism and institutional racism to concentration of research on wealthier and more privileged populations, psychology’s dominant philosophy of science downplays cultural phenomena and ethnic minority groups, and concern with internal rather than external validity in psychological science” (Sue, 2009, p.410).
Considering how evident the themes of reconciliation are in the media, I was surprised to find that the topic of Indigenous worldview was lacking in the field of psychology. The lack of research I found relating to my research question further fulfilled my confidence in the qualitative methods that I had invested in. There were many sources about Indigenous culture focused on the trauma and contemplative actions around ideas concerting “a fix”. However, I found myself resisting to even flip through those documents. I believed that I only wanted to focus on the positive parts of Indigenous culture and avoided at all costs any focus on the negative intergenerational trauma that persists. I felt by avoiding looking into the historical trauma that I would avoid feeding the demons of that history. Still, as it is truly inevitable, parts of the traumatic history I was avoiding would catch my eye on the pages of documents I was studying. My attention was drawn to those items as I was shocked that I did not know certain things. The realization that I was not aware of the full truth became more and more pressing for me; I wanted to know the truth, not precisely for the research project, but because I realized that something in me needed to know. I soon discovered that the traumatic histories, that I only found out about in the past year, and that many people are still unaware of, is vital and not an option in avoiding when honestly learning about the lands First Peoples.

Into Fall

Yellow

The truth. James Daschuk’s book, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*, provides a truthful account of what occurred to Indigenous Peoples when the government bid to clear the land for the settlers. I had learned about Indigenous culture in elementary school social studies classes and one Indigenous Culture University course, but the nadirs shared in the award-winning book changed me. Particularly,
Chapter 7 and 8, of Daschuk’s (2013) book shocked me as I read accounts of First Peoples forced onto reserves, having no clothes to protect themselves in winter, their once able-bodies diminished into skeletons, sicknesses followed due to immune suppression and starvation, and a government that would react to any retaliation by retaining food from the already starving and in the worst case, cause death. John A. Macdonald, who served as the Canadian Prime Minister from 1867-1873 and 1878-1891, shared his government position on relief, saying, “We cannot allow them to die for want of food. …[W]e are doing all we can, by refusing food until the Indians are on the verge of starvation, to reduce the expense” (Duschuk, 2013, p. 123).

Essentially, with Macdonald’s prejudice filtrating through the political workings of a country preparing for settlers, a “Canadian holocaust” developed (Harper, 2014).

Something shifted in me when I read the truth. Something in me changed. My beliefs attached to my Canadian identity, such as, “home of the strong and free”, and the guise of being a nurturing, supportive, and caring nation for all ethnicities, was shattered.

**Harsh winds.** The content in Clearing the Plains, began to really affect me. I set the book down in disbelief and my eyes shot up to a nearby window as harsh blizzard winds whipped down the street outside my home on a freezing day in November of 2018. I envisioned my own precious toddler son standing in the street with no shoes on and nothing to protect his body from the winter elements. I began to weep. This horrific history occurred in my, in our, own backyard. I can only imagine the feeling of having all my rights taken away. I can only imagine the helpless feeling of experiencing such criminal injustices being only a fraction of the helpless feeling I have now. As I stare out the window, all I can think is, “I am so sorry. I am so sorry. I am so sorry.”
However, what was the something in me that changed? I believe a novel empathy emerged when the shock shattered or brought to my attention the biases I possessed. The capacity of empathy can be defined as, “to refer to different phenomena that are related to this kind of emotion sharing,” that consists of, “caring for others, understanding others, and validating others’ emotions” (Wondra & Ellsworth, 2015, p. 411). The impetus behind either an act of empathy or sympathy may appear similar but is in fact vastly different in regards to the ripple effect of said phenomena. Debatably, before this epiphany, I believe I viewed the First Peoples through a habit of sympathy and not of empathy. Empathy nurtures the epitome of understanding that generates or furthers connection and appreciation, whereas, sympathy accentuates the countenance of concern an individual may have for another (Wiseman, 1996).

**The role of reconciliation.** As Canadians, we share a responsibility to look after each other and acknowledge the pain and suffering that our diverse societies have endured—a pain that has been handed down to the next generations. We need to right those wrongs, heal together, and create a new future that honours the unique gifts of our children and grandchildren.

How do we do this? Through sharing our personal stories, legends and traditional teachings, we found that we are interconnected through the same mind and spirit. Our traditional teachings speak to acts such as holding one another up, walking together, balance, healing and unity. Our stories show how these teachings can heal pain and restore dignity. We discovered that in all of our cultural traditions, there are teachings about reconciliation, forgiveness, unity, healing and balance (Commission of Canada, 2015).
The above passage is from the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume One: Summary, Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*. Although, the motivation for the research was not primarily focused on reconciliation, it is important to mention as it inheritably played a role in the process. Reconciliation is defined by the Commission of Canada (2015) as, “establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country” (p.16). The Commission believes in order for the goal of relationship to occur that knowledge of the past, recognition of the harm that ensued, restitution of the causes, and commencement of behavioral change must take place (Commission of Canada, 2015). Just as my history of growing up on a farm has played an opulent role in my personal paradigm, understanding the history of Indigenous Peoples and the culture was essential if I was going to further fulfill my inquests.

**Apology.** Now, as I raise my own children in a city scape, I wonder how their interpretation of Indigenous culture will be different than my own. With their generation has come a huge shift in providing a culturally appropriate Indigenous education; motivated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Their school education involves such things as receiving visits from Elders or showing support through Orange Shirt Day. I’m sure these initiatives are coming from positive sources of motivation but do my children understand why these initiatives are happening? As a mother, I believe my own intentions and motivations behind the behavior I expect from my children comes from a good place. However, I am reminded of moments when I’ve made my children apologize for a wrong doing. They hesitantly walk up to the person they have harmed and without making eye contact spew out an apology. Although they are doing what is right, the
apology feels hollow as something is missing. Perhaps, this something is a true understanding of the influence of their actions.

Interpretations of reconciliation. I imagined reconciliation as the movement of the Canadian Government flipping the hourglass of change and the sand specks within the hourglass represent non-Indigenous people. The other feature of the hourglass is that the specks of sand decide when they get to fall by becoming more familiar with Indigenous affairs, taking part in a reconciling act, or listening to the stories of residential school survivors. When the sand falls it serves as motivation that fills the space of support within the government apologies. Without true comprehension of the story, there is no substance, true motivation, or base for the actions of reconciliation to flourish. However, I struggled with the idea that even if all the specks of sand eventually fall, there will still be a barricade of glass between the sand, representing non-Indigenous people and the Indigenous Peoples on the land. The sand can see through the glass but it is not part of the source that it came from. I wondered what it would take for the glass to vanish or if that was even an option? Does the glass represent colonization that runs through the systems and bureaucracy of the country? What would it take for the glass to disappear, to shatter? Once shattered, the power of the wind would blend the sand into the earth again. I pondered if it was the element of wind and being with the ground, of the Earth, that was missing in my research approach, was missing in my Western methodology. Along with the realization that the primary fruition of spirituality of Indigenous culture was missing in my methods, I came to know that if I was to truly experience an Indigenous worldview, it could not take place from behind a cordon of glass. I recognized that the Western qualitative methods I was using (i.e. ethnography, participant observation, and phenomenology) were formulated and acclimatized to the environment of the hourglass, and not that of the environment outside of the hourglass.
Furthermore, the foundations that methodologies are devised out of may not be reflective of all components involved in being researched, especially is instances surrounding cultural content, as, “applying a Western methodology in an Indigenous context may be incompatible because the underlying epistemology of Western methods and theories are not Indigenous” (Wilson, 2008).

Decolonizing self. Research stories about decolonization of self often involve an experience of a failed constituent caused by a juxtaposed solution. For example, Ranjan Datta (2018) explains how when he became aware of the challenges his research contained when encountering and including various perspectives (worldviews) in his work, he sought further education in solving the challenges but was further let down. Datta (2018) shares,

My expectation in interdisciplinary research training was to solve and or understand the practical challenges from various perspectives. I thought our training focus would be on the dynamic of community engagement by advocating participation in community-based projects and service learning. However, in our research training we were taught how to be more scientific in our research (p. 9).

By seeking additional education to answer his cogitations, the further execution of colonizing occurred. The available training further instilled the use of the Western scientific method for research facilitation and hampered the incorporation of appropriate epistemologies when working with cross cultural populations. Basically, how can colonization be solved with colonization?

Decolonization, can be described as an approach in keeping “Indigenous voices and epistemologies” at the core of the research process (Smith, 1999). Decolonization is a forever-evolving awareness ensuring appropriate respect transpires supporting the ontology of Indigenous culture (Datta, 2018). The personal undertaking of decolonization, as I learned,
requires and involves a progression of, “becoming, unlearning, and relearning regarding who we are as a researcher and educator, and taking responsibilities for participants” (Datta, 2018, p. 2).

**Eyes wide shut.** I mentioned before that it was as if my “eyes were wide shut” going into this process. They were wide as I eagerly wanted to learn but shut as if I was blinding or protecting myself from the truth; what I learned plays an essential role in contributing to comprehension of an Indigenous worldview. Through the literature it became evident that individuals, similar to myself being non-Indigenous, had epiphanies acknowledging resistance alongside a naïve refutation of the truth. For example, Keewatin (2002) writes in a section of coincidently titled “Eyes wide shut” of *Balanced Research: Understanding an Indigenous Paradigm*,

My involvement with the Native people of Canada began in university during my undergraduate studies. In a multicultural course, there was on section that explored the education of Native people in Canada and it touched on the history and the residential school experience. I remember being amazed that I was a citizen of Canada in my twenties and I had not heard of any of the issues facing Native people. Nowhere in my schooling, my lessons from home or my experience had I learned about the treatment of Native people…Was I someone who was oblivious to my environment, or was I a typical Canadian? (p. 5).

I also contemplated how a group of individuals with “eyes wide shut” would be reflective on to the surrounding environment. Jones (2009) contends that the finger of racism is no long limited to only deliberate prejudice and racial discrimination, but now points to assiduous racial biases digressed through establishments strategy and appointments.

**Still Falling**
The role of education. In the beginning, keeping the historical truth out of my research was from a place of good intentions, I now realize that it is in part due to a reflection of the education I received in my upbringing. Not that the content shared in the curriculums was not true, it is that very little inclusion of the facts that occurred after the European settler’s arrived was included. It is as if the higher status beings of our Canadian society, pertaining to our government, were trying to keep the truth away from the people in perpetuating a one-sided story that further permits the actions of the government in reference to Native affairs. Within the pages of the *Final Report of Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, the words so uncommonly linked to one of Canada’s founding fathers, Sir. John A. Macdonald, lay as,

> When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men (p. 2).

I feel it is important to remember and acknowledge that this was the thought basis that was evident throughout the initial creation of Canada. I also wonder how influential and prominent this mindset was in the further creation of all systems in Canada (that of course generationally evolved with the times), and how much of the bias of viewing the lands First Peoples as savages, is still evident in the darkest places of the White Man’s mind? Although the above words of Macdonald are not the words he is known for, nor was he the only one to possess such beliefs,
there are many common passages similar to the one above. For example, Duncan Campbell Scott, who was Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs in 1920, said in regards to policy, “our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department that is the whole object of this Bill” (Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 54).

I contemplated the idea that if political powers could force children from their families and put them into residential schools, then what biases and control were being filtrated into the content I received in my education? Although the higher order of Canadian government commands the nation, various levels of individuals follow through with the directives, such as, teachers and priests.

The people who built, funded, and operated the schools offered varying justification for this destructive intrusion into the lives of Aboriginal families. Through it, they wished to turn the children into farmers and farmers’ wives. They wanted the children to abandon their Aboriginal identity and come to know the Christian god. They feared that if the children were not educated, they would be a menace to the social order of the country. Canadian politicians wished to find a cheap way out of their long-term commitments to Aboriginal people. Christians churches sought government support for their missionary efforts. The schools were part of the colonization and conversion of Aboriginal people, and were intended to bring civilization and conversation of Aboriginal people, and were intended to bring civilization and salvation to their children. These were the rationales that were used to justify making the lives of so many children so un happy (Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 43).
Filing into the discussion of the education I was exposed to, it was not until I had the opportunity to more deeply study Indigenous culture that I began to ponder the makeup of my own worldview. As this was something I had seldom pondered, not that I have been without travel and exposure to culture, but that just how much of my paradigm is truly me or created out of the influence of the government, media, my upbringing, and so on. This is why I now stand behind the importance and necessity in learning the truths of Canadian history. As I shared prior in how reading stories about the cultural genocide that Indigenous peoples endured, the horrendous portrayals of how people were treated, essentially in my own backyard, startled and shook up my identity. It was as if I no longer wanted to be identified as a Canadian and I jumped or broke out of this world.

**Blue**

*Grief of loss.* I was feeling hurt, lied too, and grieving my identity. I found myself standing outside of the person I thought I was, looking back onto a world that once defined me. I was also at a place where I could look upon the Indigenous World and found a sense of home as I began to practice ceremony and nurture a lost relationship with Mother Earth. However, I had no idea what to do with the research and found myself at a standstill as I stood gazing at two worlds. The one world I no longer knew, and the other I knew nothing about.

**Winter**

*Methodology abandonment.* It was around this time that I abandoned the original research path that I proposed. The study began with the tools I knew and had access to. In the first phase of the study I used qualitative approaches of ethnography and participant observation to procure knowledge through literature and experiential happenings pertaining to Indigenous
culture. I then reflected any details, thoughts, and epiphanies of my experience into field journal entries. Once I felt confidence in my developed knowledge body I contacted individuals at the University of Regina, who had a rich understanding of Indigenous culture, using an interpretive phenomenological perspective. This research path did not make it past the interview component and interestingly the conflict associated with recruitment of individuals to speak with coincided with the personal conflict I was feeling when I began to realize I had a lens placed upon my own eyes. Then coincidently, once I was aware of my personal worldview, I was able to meet with four individuals with a rich understanding of Indigenous culture. These meetings occurred after I found myself in a space of the between and had abandoned my Western methodological approach. It was during this time that the real methods of the project emerged by said individuals bringing to my attention what I was portraying through my words and actions.

When I found myself in the space between, the only thing I did know was that I could share my story with the individuals I was meeting with. I would share with them the stories of my childhood that brought me to the research I was doing and how I was lost and did not know where to go or do with what I had learned thus far. Every time I met with an individual the word “journey” was shared and although my research was titled *Exploration in Understanding an Indigenous Worldview*, I accepted that it really was a journey. It was a journey into myself and rediscovering my relationship to the source that which I came from: the Earth. I accepted that I was the true participant of my research project. This is when I found peace within the process and allowed myself to open to whatever it may bring. I also began to study deeper into the Indigenous methodologies that were suggested to me and that I had been intuitively taking part in.
Nothing opens to everything. I had abandoned everything I thought I knew and found myself with nothing besides my experiences and my feet upon the ground. I used what I had.

Indigo

Evolution into self-locating. Without being aware of it, I was taking part in an Indigenous methodology called self-location. Self-location is an act that is usually portrayed intuitively by Indigenous individuals involved in the introduction of self in conversation that provides respect to the ancestors and cultural identity to be associated with community (Kovach, 2010). The act of self-location of a researcher may involve reflexivity as they share parts of their story and collaboratively produce content with the participant, all the while developing and deepening relation (Kovach, 2010). The process of self-location provides acknowledgment of how experiences have molded an individual’s beliefs and interpretations of occasions that also lends itself to, “…not only the questions we ask, but how we go about asking them, but who we are in asking them” (Kovach, 2010, p. 111). The tool of self-location has the potential to bring awareness to status inequalities in society and for justifying initiatives that diminish social injustice (Kovach, 2010).

“You need to understand why you are doing this research because it’s only going to work if you do it for yourself,” the Knowledge Keeper said during my first meeting with her. Little did I know then that the wisdom she shared with me that day would be the essential root and identity of my research. The identity of the research and myself within the research stems from my first remembered relationships with Indigenous culture as I interacted with the abandoned fragments of their existence that was left behind on my family’s farm land. Her suggestion in knowing my motives and sticking to them was the seed of the research. In
Margaret Kovach’s (2010) book, *Indigenous Methodologies Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, she shares the importance of memory in the role of the researcher through the words of Eber Hampton,

He advises researchers to go back in time to unfold the sacred medicine bundle that holds memories and consider how memory shapes personal truth. This matters because researchers need to know their personal motives for undertaking their research, and they are usually found in story. Indigenous research frameworks ask for clarity of both the academic and personal purpose, and it is the purpose statement within Indigenous research that asks: What is your purpose for this research? How is your motivation found in your story? Why and how does this research give back to community? (p. 114).

*The little prairie girl knows.* I remember standing on one of the stones of the tipi ring in the pasture. I was probably 5 or 6-years-old the first time I truly remember playing on them. This time particularly I remember just standing on one of the stones silently, like a statue, as my father and siblings played around the stones. I remember closing my eyes feeling the prairie wind on my cheeks and wisps of curly honey hair dancing across my face. As I opened my eyes my gaze was towards a slough close by that I assumed whomever lived here would have gotten water from. However, for how young I was I knew something wasn’t quite right about this awesome piece of history I got to experience. I was too young to put the feeling into words but now as I remember I feeling a heavy sense of melancholy cinders across my throat and chest. “Daddy, where did they go?”

I found myself accepting the stories of the land but also the concept that the land shares stories. The lands I grew up on were covered in tattoos of those stories from the tipi rings to the
wagon wheel trails that still faintly exist. Often in my life when I meet someone with a tattoo I will ask them about it. They usually reply back with a story. It is simple enough but out of asking and listening I am able to create a relationship with that individual. It is through metaphor, that the memories of my relation to Indigenous culture never had the story shared. The stories were stripped away and tried to abruptly be ended. The cycle that rules Indigenous life, and arguably all individuals, was broken when the Indigenous were forced from the places they reside, when the stories were ripped and beaten out of the children. I believe I somehow recognized this as a young child, and my heart wept. I wonder if one of the reasons I pursued this research was to fill in the missing pieces of the stories I inquired about as a child. I began to see and acknowledge the power of stories. Within the *Truth and Reconciliation* report, a non-Indigenous woman, shared after witnessing residential school survivors’ stories, that, “By listening to your story, my story can change. By listening to your story, I can change” (Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 21).

**The power of stories.** The thousands of Survivors who publicly shared their residential school experiences at TRC events in every region of this country have launched a much-needed dialogue about what is necessary to heal themselves, their families, communities, and the nation. Canadians have much to benefit from listening to the voices, experiences, and wisdom of Survivors, Elders, and Traditional Knowledge Keepers—and much more to learn about reconciliation. Aboriginal peoples have an important contribution to make to reconciliation. Their knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, and connections to the land have vitally informed the reconciliation process to date, and are essential to its ongoing progress (Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 9)

Learning by listening does not preface in acknowledgment of what happened, but it plays a part in bringing up the broken ponderings of my own memories to mend the full circle.
[There must be] a change in perspective about the way in which Aboriginal peoples would be engaged with Canadian society in the quest for reconciliation… [We cannot] perpetuate the paternalistic concept that only Aboriginal peoples are in need of healing…. The perpetrators are wounded and marked by history in ways that are different from the victims, but both groups require healing…. How can a conversation about reconciliation take place if all involved do not adopt an attitude of humility and respect?.... We all have stories to tell and in order to grow in tolerance and understanding we must listen to stories of others. (Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 9-10).

I am not saying it was my literal hands that took part in the traumas that occurred. I am not saying that those missing parts in the stories of the pasture lands I grew up on cause deep trauma but there is a spiritual pain there. A pain for all the peoples and a pain for the earth. Hearing the stories of the Aboriginal peoples and uncovering the truth melds the pieces together to make the stories full circled. So, I can meet my brothers and sisters in the space between with both our feet on the ground and genuinely share how sorry I am that they went through what they did. The emotional barriers that built the walls due to the government biases that were reflected on myself in my environment have been brought down. I believe this allows for the meeting place in the space between.

Although my true motivations were not that of deepening my understanding of reconciliation and taking steps towards decolonizing myself, it is something that unfolded, and I recognized was necessarily pressing and important for myself to go into. There is not a path or set of guidelines an individual can take to come to understand reconciliation. The journey into this uncovering occurred on my own terms and it its own way. A voice in the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) shares
Governments like to write...policy, and they like to write legislation, and they like codify things and so on. And Aboriginal people want to talk about restoration, reconciliation, forgiveness, about healing...about truth. And those things are all things of the heart and of relationship, and not of government policy. Governments do a bad job of that (p. 20).

This voice relates to the one of the differences I notice in myself now, similar to that of which I muse about how much the influence of the bureaucracy has filtered its way through Canada’s developed systems, into curriculums and right into my head. In whatever way an individual wants to describe it, as in heart, spirit, soul, that the inclusion of my heart feels more open. It is as if the glass of the hourglass was blocking true connection and relation.

Another difference is my renewed and developing relation to the land. A voice that stuck with me from the Reconciliation Report shares, “The land is made up of the dust of our ancestors’ bones. And so, to reconcile with this land and everything that has happened, there is much work to be done...in order to create balance” (Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 9).

Forgiveness. Forgive me for stomping on you. I woke hot and confused and feeling like there no blood in my arms and legs. I feel completely heavy and lifeless yet light and floating. All I want to do is cry. I want to cry. I feel like I’ve made a huge mistake taking on this research. It is such a struggle. No one wants to talk to me. The Knowledge Keeper was the only one who took me in. She told me that there is going to be friction, fire will happen, and if it doesn’t I’m not doing it right. But why? The fire on the sand, the pressure, the heat, the conflict- diamonds result. A tear falls. Why do I have to go on a monumental journey that require such depth and healing and resurrection of self and soul? Why does it have to be so complicated? This journey is me. That somehow copes and survives in a world that she doesn’t quite understand. All that which I can’t quite
explain. The fight. This research. Maybe I’ll fit in there? Is that how they feel? Everyone
takes and takes away? Is my research going to take on this deepness and become a paper
of realization, a masterpiece in psyche pain and exploration by incorporating indigenous
ceremony into self and creating the passage unto Gaia and I return home to be at one
and at peace with the mother? Please hold me. I felt pulled and called upon to take this
journey but what am I doing? Just picked and placed on top of it all. Help me grow roots.
Let your ways channel into communication with her. A tear falls. I’m allowing myself to
do this but I’m done trying because it hurts. I’m not putting myself out there. Its
contradictory. A Tear. What is the conflict. What is the truth in this. Am I willing to allow
the truth to be shared? A tear falls. Why am I doing this? What is my relationship with
her? Just something I stomp on? Something I dream being whole with? Forgive me. The
tears fall. I’m so sorry.

The First Signs of Spring

Violet

Reflection. Yes, I struggled greatly through the many phases of the year-long project.
The initial struggle was simple that I had a hard time accessing information and research
pertaining to my ponderings. It was not as simple as typing in “worldview” into Psych Info of the
University of Regina Database and surfing through the flood of endless articles. It required a
more quizzical search by digging deep into databases and coincidentally happening across
literature, such as literature being left for free in hallways. It was the recommendations of the
people I contacted that helped my literature resources become more fulfilled. Later on, the
struggle became more psychological as I coped through the phases of personal realization that
occurred from the stories within reconciliation aims. I need to accept that in order to finish my
research project, I would need to let go of the Western methodologies I knew so well and embrace a more appropriate approach of methodologies that developed and arguably always existed within Indigenous epistemology. Once I felt comfortable and confident, so came the challenge of commingling the worlds that these various methodologies are rooted in. I found myself still standing outside the worlds contemplating how to blend my experiences into everything.

Out of my frustration of having a “research block” I ended up having a vision. It occurred a few days before I went to my first sweat lodge ceremony. From a place of frustration, I asked the ancestors for guidance.

_The vision._ I saw a young woman soar down from the sky and she landed in this smaller space on the ground between the two worlds. I had never really noticed the space before as my attention was always directed at the rubbing of the walls. She motioned for me to come. I jumped off the small cliff leg and found myself on the soil across from a beautiful Indigenous woman. The space felt cave-like as the walls stemmed up on either side touching soon above head. I had never noticed it before but when making walls they cannot be put on top of one another. They come out of different spaces. She knelt down and put her hand to the dirt, I noticed a red beaded prairie rose on the foot of her moccasin. She came to standing holding dirt in her hand and she said to me, “We are on the same earth.” The dirt fell from her palm and she smiled. She began to dance and motioned for me to join. We danced and danced and I smiled and laughed. She grabbed my hands and we spun around and around laughing and smiling and the colors that exist behind the walls melded by our spinning and the colors blended into a rainbow. Our spinning slowed and she smiled. She gentle, humbly, strongly yet gracefully, walked away
and soared back into the sky outside of the worlds.

I contemplated much about whether I should share my vision with others. I was scared to share the content of my vision and make myself vulnerable. Western society tends to criticize when there is a phenomenon that science cannot explain. I was scared that sharing my vision would cause it to lose the sacredness of what it means to me. I was scared that people may believe I am mentally ill. I came to realize though, that the squash of content may be similar to the experience of Indigenous individuals when a Western context does not provide the spiritual component of relations the platform it deserves because of the lack of understanding and knowledge. However, stemming out of the methodology of self-locating, even though I was sharing my own story, there were times when I needed to take a step back and listen to my own story.

After my vision, the frustration, the feeling of being stuck, and the stillness, was gone. I was still unsure of how I was to lay out and present my experiences of the research into a thesis that meets the criteria of a psychological research thesis, yet still honours all the relations of learning I had opened myself to. However, just as the colours of the worlds blended together as we danced in my vision, I knew I hand to blend everything I needed to share. This thesis is a reflection and demonstration of such, as I honour and demonstrate the Indigenous methodology of self-location through my experiences and stories. Shawn Wilson and his book titled Research as Ceremony, helped me see that essentially that my process of writing for ceremony. I discovered the only way to conquer the feat of this thesis was to incorporate the use of ceremony and prayer that I had been exposed to over the last year to insure my intentions were still true and to honour all the supports and relations that allow me to express this journey. I smudge before I write, ground myself and honour my relation to the earth, the sky, the sun, and the moon. I ask
for guidance from the ancestors to support me in allowing the cycle of my inquiry, experiences, and story to flow with respect and honour.

**Light**

An important epiphany I had regarding my journey was that of how the flow of my experience could essentially be mapped out. The evolution of my personal experience within the project evolved the emotions of myself developed, merging, then emerging, coming to times of stillness, and times that shook me up. However, the vibrations of experience resonate into one another, the path folds circularly, perhaps like the seasons (i.e. spring, summer, fall, and winter). My first analysis of my journey flow was that it appeared similar to Kübler-Ross model of grief (i.e. denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.) However, although quite similar to my experience, I felt there was something missing as the grief model did not speak fully to my experience. I then noticed that the resonance of my experience and learning, reminded me of weather patterns that influence the expression of nature that is forever cycling anew and anew.

I believe the ability for a non-Indigenous person to experience an Indigenous worldview is possible but the occurrence of such is not so black and white. I do believe it to be true that to experience an inquest into an Indigenous world view, it requires a willing openness to look into deep places of oneself and acknowledge the boxes Western society has normed into its people. By opening the door, kicking down the wall, breaking the hourglass, whatever it is that created the barriers to the outside world in an individual, they must come down for true relations to develop. Relationships will not permit connections when there are barricades of bias getting in the way. For myself, by looking and leaning into an Indigenous worldview, I began to take a look at my own worldview that I never really thought of being possibly different than anyone else. I would have never guessed the impact doing this research has had on me besides knowing I
was excited to be given an opportunity to learn about a culture that I admired, from times of
being the little prairie girl who loved seeing long braids, feel drums and voices resonate in my
body, when a pow wow demonstration would go through the school. I could almost feel the
texture of the beadwork on their regalia, as I had a little beaded change purse I would love
running my little fingers on.

Rainbows. What if a rainbow was actually a full circle? However, when the bottom half
of the circle meets the earth it shatters and the pieces bounce about. The pieces jump on
the back of sun beams and ride them like waves until they find a passage. The passages
could be anything that light reflects through such as the ballerina window charm my
mom gave me for completing grade 4, or through the small fleck in the diamond of my
engagement ring, or when they get caught in the mist off the hose in the backyard.
Everyone stops and takes a moment when they see a rainbow, even when it’s a shattered
piece that snuck into your home riding a sunbeam. It’s that moment and that feeling.
Everyone knows the feeling in their body when they see a rainbow. It’s universal.

Stories move in circles. They don’t move in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in
circles. There are stories inside stories and stories between stories, and finding your way
through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is
the getting lost. And when you’re lost, you start to look around and to listen (Metzger,
References


