

“Hope for Change—Change Can Happen”: Healing the Wounds  
of Family Violence with Indigenous Traditional Holistic Practices

by

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## Abstract

Today, a great deal of social services, health and education research funding is being channelled into studies on how to combat the myriad social issues—such as domestic violence, substance abuse, poverty, homelessness, suicide, homicide and incarceration—that have afflicted Aboriginal communities for eight generations. What has since been overlooked is that many of these research projects and the programs they give rise to, well meaning as they are, ultimately prove ineffective as they discount the cultural background of the people they seek to help. Intensive analysis focuses on a community program called Warriors Against Violence Society (WAVS), one of Vancouver's few Aboriginal health organizations that runs based on Indigenous rather than Western methods of intervention for its Aboriginal clients. The Indigenous Collaborative Research (ICR) framework investigates how culturally-based healing practices provide a more comprehensive and thus more effective method to assist members struggling with family violence. An Indigenous Knowledge-based intervention model for dealing with perceptions and experiences of family violence both intergenerational and contemporary emerges from transcribed conversations with 22 people, including co-founders, co-facilitators and members, amounting to approximately 600 pages of single-spaced text. Cultural practices involving storytelling, smudging, potlatches, honouring ceremonies, youth groups, Elder wisdom, our natural environment and parent-to-child transference of culture signify aspects of tradition integral to Aboriginal health: all suppressed during the era of Canada's enforced Residential School System, resulting in the disintegration of communities whose way of life was thrown off balance by colonization. When Western interventions fail to restore this balance it is worth investigating how a return to such Indigenous cultural and health practices can offer us better solutions to restore people suffering from family violence, drug addiction, poverty and homelessness, trouble with the law and traumatic memories. Key to the WAVS intervention model is that it acknowledges multiple aspects of well-being (spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual) and deals with *all* the factors within the history of a person, family, and/or community, which have had an impact on current health issues. Ultimately, ten emergent themes are revealed under the three categories of Total Person, Total Health and Total Environment. The study provides a basis for further research about culturally-based ways of preventing and dealing with disease be it an individual's mental or physical illness or the larger social dis-ease that continues to affects Aboriginal families and communities.

## **Preface**

This work is approved by:

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# Table Of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Preface .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table Of Contents .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List Of Figures .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Study Overview.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Context.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.2 Purpose .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.3 Personal Relevance .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.4 Warriors Against Violence Society .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.5 Background Information .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.6 Research Questions .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.7 Relational Ethics .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.8 Sequence .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>1.9 Writing On Behalf Of Participants .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>1.10 Closing Discussion.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Indigenous and Western Theoretical Systems.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2.1 Context.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2.2 The Grandmothers Are With Us .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>2.3 An Overview of Indigenous and Western Philosophical Worldviews.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>2.4 Indigenous Knowledge Systems .....</b>	<b>31</b>
2.4.1 A Māori Example of Indigenous Relational Theory and Practice.....	33
2.4.2 My Work as Similar to the Māori Example.....	35
<b>2.5 The WAVS Philosophy .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>2.6 Western Knowledge And Health.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>2.7 Healing Ways Of Being Among Urban Aboriginal Families.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>2.8 Participatory Healing At WAVS .....</b>	<b>58</b>
2.8.1 Self as our Sacred Centre .....	63
2.8.2 The East Dimension .....	65
2.8.3 The South Dimension .....	65
2.8.4 The West Dimension .....	65
2.8.5 The North Dimension.....	66



5.2.5	North: <i>I don't have to worry about looking over my shoulder or who's watching me</i> .....	193
5.3	Closing Discussion.....	197
Chapter 6:	Researcher Learnings.....	199
6.1	Context.....	199
6.2	Total Person .....	202
6.3	Total Health .....	204
6.4	Total Environment .....	208
6.5	Closing Discussion .....	210
Chapter 7:	Conclusion.....	213
7.1	General Overview.....	213
7.2	Learning From The Past.....	217
7.3	Understanding The Present .....	220
7.4	Looking Towards The Future.....	221
7.5	Recommendations.....	222
7.6	Significance And Contribution Of The Study.....	225
7.7	Limitations Of The Study .....	228
7.8	Research Implications.....	230
7.9	Closing Discussion.....	232
References	.....	234
Appendices	.....	248
Appendix A:	WAVS Letter Of Support .....	249
Appendix B:	Letter Of Initial Contact .....	250
Appendix C:	Consent Form For Participants .....	252
Appendix D:	Demographic Form .....	254

## List Of Figures

Figure 1.1 The 5 Rs of Indigenous Research Ethics .....	16
Figure 2.1 Relational Reasons for Abuse .....	60
Figure 3.1 PAR/ICR Conceptual Model .....	75
Figure 3.2 ICR Contextual Model.....	76
Figure 3.3 The Symbolic Medicine Wheel: A Balanced Path to Health and Well-being .....	85
Figure 4.1 The Symbolic Medicine Wheel of Health, Wholeness and Harmony.....	105

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## Chapter 1: Study Overview

I open this chapter with an original poem that I wrote from a conversation between my mother Juanita Jane Dennison (August 6, 1942 – March 6, 2007) and I about our disconnected experiences of family violence, a snapshot in time—that propels me toward the very heart of my doctoral work.

### And The Walls Came Tumbling Up

No, not much, I answer her, straight-faced and bland as dietary fibre.  
Oh good, she wavers.  
All these years I've worried about what you might have been carrying around inside of you.  
I only remember a few things  
mom, don't worry. One is  
the time we were 3 or  
4 and you left us in the car  
in front of the hotel while  
you zipped in for a quick  
drink... I did okay, didn't I?  
Letting you know that Chris ate  
all the aspirins from the first-aid  
kit tucked under the front seat?  
Not many others, I carried on, mostly  
some tears in bed at night listening  
to the yelling. And one big one  
in the dark outside my bedroom window. Maybe I was  
6 when I woke up from the  
fighting and checked to see  
both of you outside naked and  
he had you pinned backwards  
over the hood of the car and yelled  
at me to get back to bed.  
That's when I left for good, the second  
time—that night was the corker—  
when he split open my stitches  
from my gallbladder operation.  
Ok, thanks for piecing it together  
for me, mom, I replied matter-of-factly.  
I'm so glad you don't remember  
much, dear, she sobs, like when he  
used to swat you for toddling  
in front of the TV when his hockey  
games were on...  
No, mom, don't worry—  
I blocked that out too.

(1998)

## 1.1 Context

Family violence directly and indirectly affects family members of all ages. “Violence in families—child abuse and neglect, intimate partner violence and Elder abuse—has been documented for centuries” (McCormick, 2002, p. 50). For many First Nations peoples<sup>1</sup> healing from violence is complex, as I discover through the creative outlet if not sheer necessity of my opening poem. Coping with memories; lack of reasoning and timelines; and a bland monotone adult voice and attitude were just some of the complexities I faced in 1998 when beginning to understand myself as a child survivor of alcoholic and sometimes angry, if not violent parents. Indigenous traditional and contemporary ways of healing include awareness and honour of life with respect for self, others and environment by living in spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual balance. Yet disharmony prevails among families. While violence is a social phenomenon regardless of ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, my work focuses more specifically about Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> communities and families. In our Western dominant healthcare system, policies and practices are often culturally-ineffective for Aboriginal peoples; Aboriginal health-knowledges and ways of being are frequently misunderstood and subsequently, are pushed aside with disbelief and disdain. Bridging the chasm between Western knowledges and Indigenous ancestral/contemporary wisdom is vital for urban Aboriginal peoples to prevent and/or heal from family violence for generations to come. Aboriginal culture involves sustainability, relationality and adaptivity. A student I taught at Native Education College defines traditional culture as ‘bringing past knowledges and teachings into present practices’ (Personal Field Notes, November 17, 2011).

Warriors Against Violence Society (WAVS, pronounced ‘waves’ and also referred to as ‘warriors’) is a community agency in Vancouver, British Columbia, that leads the way in theory and practice for such family violence awareness, healing intervention and prevention. My doctoral dissertation, aptly titled by participants *‘Hope for Change—Change Can*

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<sup>1</sup> The *Constitution Act* Section 35 (2), 1982 and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) use the term “Aboriginal” to refer inclusively to Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis peoples. We interchangeably use the terms Aboriginal, First Nation and Indigenous. Where appropriate, I also use the term Indigenous as inclusive of First Peoples globally and the many similar/diverse issues they face such as colonization, language revitalization, maintenance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems, land-based and cultural rights, and individual, family and community health and wellness. Further, I pluralized the term people (i.e. peoples) as respect towards the diversities of Aboriginal peoples’ living in Canada today who are “culturally, historically, linguistically and socially diverse” (National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO), 2008, p. 4).

*Happen': Healing the Wounds of Family Violence with Indigenous Traditional Wholistic Practice* is a collaborative effort to spotlight the philosophy and practices WAVS and its attending members accomplish to end violence among Aboriginal peoples. Below is a description of my first evening visiting with WAVS:

*As people begin entering the group and saying hi to one another, Dan, one of the co-founder/facilitators works at the table with his back to the group. He has prepared sage in an abalone shell and begins offering participants the opportunity to smudge, starting with the women to the left of the door. Participants stand and begin to take off their jewelry and place it on their chairs. I take off my glasses but not by rings. He goes around the room clockwise and everyone smudges to cleanse themselves. The female facilitator, Joyce, is to my left. She leans over to tell me I can say 'pass' if I want to. I say 'thank you' but look forward to my turn and to smudging; it has been a long while since I've been at a meeting where we can smudge. After everyone is done smudging, Joe, her husband and co-founder/facilitator, says a long prayer welcoming everyone, praying for us and our brothers and sisters living on the streets and struggling with addictions. (Group Meeting Field Note, April 5, 2008)*

## **1.2 Purpose**

As a result of multiple cultural losses and colonial practices that degrade First Nations peoples' cultural ways in mainstream urban-living, violence has become a negative response among many Aboriginal families and communities (Chrisjohn, Young and Marun, 2006; Dion Stout, Kipling and Stout, 2001; Haig-Brown, 1988; Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996; Study Participants, 2011). WAVS was founded as a culturally-specific socio-educational organization in response to the above evidential health concerns. My focus is to qualitatively investigate a specific Aboriginal wholistic intervention model found to be effective for diminishing family violence. As lead researcher on this graduate program and dissertation project, I believe that as collaborators and contributors we are all researchers and participants; hence this is the primary reason I write this document in both the first person-singular ('I' and 'my') and in the first person-plural ('we' and 'our'). Simply put, I prefer the immediacy of this work. Canadian novelist, Elizabeth Hays

shares, 'I write to myself as the first reader—if there is something there, I enjoy it—if there is not anything there, then I do not' (UBC Lecture Series, March 3, 2012). My personal writing style is not meant to be monotonous or an 'all-about-me-dot-com' process; instead I hope that my second readers, to whom Hays might refer, do not feel pangs of dissertational boredom.

As I seek ways to present my own voice throughout my work, in personal anecdote strategic-placements. For example, I also endeavour to re/present as accurately as possible participant perspectives and voices. The end result is my written intention to bring forth the conceptual and contextual, intertwined realities of such a complex topic as family violence: some content reflects individuality while other material indicates essentialism. For instance, violence inflicts physical and mental pain on one's self and/or another person; and healing from complex trauma involves a 'self' and 'others' healing journey. Western schools of thought, often referred to as the mainstream point of view and practice, do not completely envelop Indigenous ways of knowing and visa versa.

In this dissertation I address the salient matter of violence (no matter its Western or Indigenous derivatives). First, I explore ways in which the WAVS model imparts an understanding of contributing factors of family violence such as past traumas, poverty, power, substance abuse and social norms (Graveline, 2002; Jewkes, 2002; Mitchell and Maracle, 2005). Second, I articulate how the agency's members utilize some of the specific tools offered by the agency are found necessary for healing from violence. They express the positive impacts that WAVS has on their healing journeys and across time as their coping defenses begin tumbling down, rather than like the 1998 exchange between my mother and I, whereby mine protectively came 'tumbling up'.

In his study "Understanding the Elevated Risk of Partner Violence Against Aboriginal Women: A Comparison of Two Nationally Representative Surveys of Canada", Douglas Brownridge (2008) defines violence as acts of

- **Physical Threat:** Being threatened to be hit with a fist or anything else that could hurt
- **Physical Assault:** Having something thrown at you that could hurt; being pushed, grabbed or shoved in a way that could hurt; being slapped; being hit with something that could hurt; being kicked, bit or hit with a fist; being beaten; being choked; the threat or use of a knife or gun

- **Sexual Assault:** Being forced into any sexual activity by being threatened, held down or hurt in some way. (p. 358)

Aboriginal identity is another socio-demographic factor associated with spousal violence. Results of the General Social Survey (2009) indicate that those who self-identified as an Aboriginal person are Find thesis title and date to make a footnote Crucial to positive change for many Aboriginal peoples is understanding 1) the legacy of shame and violence from generations of colonization and 2) the positive effects of wholistically bringing together culture, tradition and ceremony as effective components of healing from experiencing family violence (Vedan, 2002). About shame, Martha Noyes, a Hawaiian scholar, offers an encouraging perspective: “There is no blame, no guilt. There is only the responsibility each of us chooses to recognize the pain and heal the wound” (2003, vii). Likewise, WAVS members, through program evaluations retrospectively summed their healing also:

- *My family used to refer to me as ‘the dark cloud’, the support I have received from this group has enabled me to be more supportive to my family and loving*
  - *Our family is more open and supportive of each other. We discuss our issues in family meetings*
  - *We came in as a single person or troubled couple and we’re leaving with knowledge*
  - *My life has vastly improved because of the Warrior Teachings. Many people have noticed the big difference in my attitude*
- (September 2009-July 2010 Session)

One evaluative response becomes particularly personal to me as researcher. To the program feedback question, “What parts of the group have been helpful?”, one respondent member states, *I would say the time when Joe left the room. That was a good practice* (WAVS Member-Session Evaluation, 2009/2010). From my Group Meeting Field Notes, I agree with this person that the following demonstration is effective:

*Joe (co-founder and co-facilitator of WAVS) gives a startling example of ownership during the session tonight. As a facilitator, his action was planned but members, including myself, did not know it was coming. He throws the*

*feather down and said, 'I can't do this. I'm upset right now'—and walked heavily out the door, moderately slamming it. Another group member heads out to see how he was doing and his wife Joyce soon follows. Upon their return, Joe asks, 'Who took that personally? Who blamed themselves for my mood?' Many people say yes, wondering if they had done something disrespectful; again, myself included (had I whispered a friendly comment to the person beside me too loudly?). It seems many of us take on the blame for Joe's feelings. He finishes this particular learning by saying, 'The mind thinks at 360 words/minute and 80% of those thoughts are negative.'* (Group Meeting Field Note, July 5, 2010)

Suddenly, as I seek, find and add this specific note, it hits home for me. My above passage serves not only as a reminder of what I learn from WAVS but also as resonance to this discussion of blurred identities—who is to ultimately define individual facilitators, members, participants and researchers among our separate, yet inter-connected pain/healing journeys? Meanwhile some WAVS members wonder, 'Why this anger, why this abuse among our families and communities?' Dan, co-founder of WAVS points out, *I just wanted to understand. If someone had told me why I was picked on in the school yard, what that was all about, then maybe I would not have been so angry* (Aboriginal Community Guidance Committee (ACGC) Field Note, October 2, 2009). Scholars like Boyer (2006), Chrisjohn, Young and Marun (2006), Fournier and Crey (1997), continue to ask this question—*why*—and continue to seek answers to it. My role as a researcher is to de/familiarize the all-too familiarity of systemic Aboriginal by underscoring one particular exemplar: Warriors Against Violence Society. Upon a solid foundation of traditional teachings and customary ways of healing, Warriors fills the void of education of cultural-specific reasons for violence among many urban Aboriginal peoples and the contemporary knowledge gaps that prevent healing. The ultimate purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore and to document what the WAVS intervention model is; what it offers its members; how members perceive its influence on their lives; and how and why the WAVS approach could benefit more families in more communities.

In order for me to make meaning of the WAVS healing paradigm—inclusive of participant storytelling, no matter what traditional or patch-quilt discourses offered me—I need to be curious and open to demarcated, animate, 'walking' discourses. I silently observe with all of my six senses: sight, smell, touch, taste, hearing and intuitive-ancestral wisdoms.

In doing so I organize my research processes into the following six guiding principles. In parentheses I index in what specific chapters the exploratory-based answers are revealed:

1. **What—and for whom**—is the defined situation? In what ways and for whom has the WAVS community allowed me to join and to academically story-tell? (Chapters 1: Introduction and 2: Theoretical Frameworks);
2. **How** are we to accomplish the matter at hand and effect positive change? (Chapter 3: Methodological Perspectives);
3. **Where** are the safest locations for relevant concerns to be discussed? (Chapter 3: Study Methods);
4. **Why** is the identified situation and ensuing response important? To whom is it most vital? (Chapters 4 and 5: WAVS and Participant Teachings and Learnings);
5. **So What – Implications** – What impacts are revealed and why/how can our learned knowledge assist throughout this process? (Chapter 6, Researcher Learnings); and
6. **Now What – Recommendations** – What philosophical and practical changes are needed, where do we go from here and how can we continue to effect necessary change in Aboriginal peoples' health, healing and well-being for our future generations? (Chapter 7: Closing Considerations).

I do not imply that such simplistic sounding imperatives as *What/Who/Why/How/Where/So what/Now what* and their descriptions are in any way rudimentary; rather, these cornerstone questions are guiding stepping stones in our collaborative study. In fact, I understand the principles as profound, powerful and of vital importance to my collaborative relationships with WAVS founders/facilitators and members. Such relationships, questions and ensuing answers are in constant motion both relationally and adaptationally; they are a living process of “Storytellers in Motion”, a titled song by Russell Wallace, a WAVS (Wallace/Fossella) family member (*Heart Beats: A CD Benefit for*

*Warriors Against Violence*, 2009). Shawn Wilson (2008) writes with a similar kind of forward motion; he creatively narrates to his three young sons as well as to his academic readers advocating that “an Indigenous research paradigm is relational and maintains relational accountability” (p. 71). Within my own life I too, walk a path of relationality and adaptability.

### **1.3 Personal Relevance**

Family violence, both directly and indirectly, affects Elders, mothers, wives, sisters, fathers, husbands and brothers—children of all ages. While intergenerational challenges do exist, they are not always publically witnessed. After witnessing alcohol-related violence between my parents, 25 years later I experienced degrees of violence from my sons towards me after their Dad and I divorced in 1999. The domino effect of hurt and anger took its toll on our family: my oldest son took his anger and hurt out on his younger brother and then my middle and youngest sons each took their anger and hurt out on me. One by one, year by year, we all matured and began to heal—me as a new solo parent and they as healthier, more confident youth and young men. I also personally understand significant implications of poverty. For example, as a single parent between 1999 and 2007, I needed to register for two annual Salvation Army Christmas Hampers of food and gifts for my us. In addition, at two different elementary schools I worked staff gifted us with collected money, food donations and grocery-store gift certificates.

Just as kind staff members from my past identified we were a family in need, I identify my heritage as a necessity to understand who I am. In doing so I am the only one in my maternal family to seek those ‘who’ answers. In 2002, armed with the names, birth, marriage and death dates of my mother’s French-Canadian Algonquin/Métis relations, I requested a genealogical search through the Vernon Métis Association of BC. Sinclair (2003) outlines the purpose of locating oneself as a researcher in Aboriginal research:

It means revealing our identities to others; who we are, where we come from, our experiences that have shaped those things and our intentions for the work we do. Hence, ‘location’ in Indigenous research, as in life, is a critical starting point. (p. 122)

Brown and Strega (2005) encourage researchers to position themselves at the beginning of their work. They advocate that location “is essential to Indigenous methodologies and



Aboriginal research/world view/epistemologies” and suggest that as Aboriginal researchers, the reason we write about ourselves is because “the only thing we can write about with authority is ourselves” (p. 97). Creswell (2007) suggests that such positioning is more than autobiographical but also focuses on “how individuals’ culture, gender, history and experiences shape all aspects of the qualitative project from question choices, data collection and interpretations” (p. 47). With self-identification protocols such as these instilled within me, I carry on.

Validated hereditary-knowledge has been vital to me, in that I can nostalgically consider, ‘Okay, finally it all makes sense—now I know why I am different; why I think wholistically to always seek to understand the bigger picture and to understand how it is I can sit bedside with gentleness as my grandmother, mother, father, best friend and acquaintances I met through my hospice volunteerism. And lastly, how it is that I can unfailingly acknowledge myself as a visitor on whose ancestral lands I present my learnings and scholarly teachings at numerous conferences across North America. Like so many participants in this study, my identity is indeed personal with long lasting and emotionally-binding attachments to my journey thus far. I am a Métis woman on the life-long quest to reclaim traditional knowledges, customs and understandings. This parallel path has led me to my current study in which I seek to honour marginalized voices by countering hegemonic societal forces, a fluid life-long experience that drives my passion and commitment to this study. Not unlike many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, I experience both the implicit and explicit attempts to silence my voice, my thoughts and my perceptions throughout my childhood as someone living with a disability; in the workforce as a person with a disability; and within the professional community. Since learning to reject intimidation from those who seek to overtly discount my views, the people I know—more specifically, WAVS members/participants—actively trust in my authentic strength to collaborate with them at this particular juncture in our lives.

We are faced with so many things, violence, drugs, alcohol. So we’re going back to our culture, to the old ways; taking our children back into the longhouse, taking them into the sweat lodge ... It’s coming back strong. The cycle of healing. We’re healing a lot of people of the suffering when they went to [residential] school ... Their cycle is coming back. They’re giving themselves back to the Great Spirit.

It is good to sit with an Elder. It is good medicine for us. (The Late Chief Simon Baker, cited in Verna Kirkness, 1992, p. 173)

In 2009, similar to what Chief Baker explains, I too was faced with ‘so many things’. Knowing the general vicinity of my doctoral work—Aboriginal health—was not sufficient. Focusing on courses about Aboriginal theory, methodology and education did not excuse me from needing a bird’s-eye view of certainty. It was during this time that I meet the founders and facilitators of Warriors Against Violence Society. They were a collaborative partner for another study about Aboriginal women and violence on which I worked as a research assistant. After a number of months participating in WAVS evening support meetings as an observer, I remember my thoughts of gratitude for being welcomed into the group. Some evenings I share how I feel as both an outsider (as a researcher) and also as someone remembering the years my parents were alcoholics and fought with one another and how, therefore, I can relate to some of the group discussions. I can describe Facilitator Joe’s underlying acceptance and spoken belief in me: one particular evening, after my brief circle check-in, as I am about to pass the feather to the person sitting to my left, he stops me, saying, *Wait, you are a part of this group now. Before you pass the feather, tell us how you feel* (Group Meeting Field Note, July 5, 2010). As part of every WAVS group introductory check-in we were to give two ‘feeling’ words that described our emotions at the time. It is with gratitude to Chief Baker and the WAVS facilitators and members convictions that our cycles are coming back. It is good medicine for us—that I share about and with the agency: its history and its contemporary program. Not all cycles feel good as they manifest into memories, as many participants explain throughout this dissertation; however, we do recognize a ‘*Hope for Change*’ as this dissertation is titled, the need for change and move forward in our thoughts and healing actions.

## **1.4 Warriors Against Violence Society**

In 1997, Change of Seasons, an Aboriginal men’s anger counselling organization, was forced to restructure its facilitation costs because of injurious government funding cuts. Despite this fiscal setback two group members recognized that funding shortfalls did not negate the necessity for Aboriginal cultural practices to heal family violence. In 1998, Joe (*Sechelt and Hawaiian Nations*) and Daniel Parker (*Burrard, Squamish, Hawaiian and Chilean Nations*) founded the current community organization, WAVS. Soon after Warriors

first opened its doors to assist men wanting to change their behaviours, their partners counselled the Warriors facilitators about their mistaken exclusion: women asked, how can we heal our families when men and women are segregated from one another in our healing process? The women spoke and the Warriors listened—Joyce Fossella (*Lil'wat Nation*) and Gail Parker (*Blackfoot and Chippewa Nations*) became co-facilitators alongside their husbands. Presently, the counsellor-trained facilitators provide three consecutively run 28-week socio-educational sessions a year. Co-ed group sessions are held on Monday evenings while the men and women gather separately to support one another on Thursday evenings.

## 1.5 Background Information

A growing body of literature documents the negative health effects of family violence within Aboriginal communities (Dion Stout, 2009; Jones, 2008; Keel, 2004; Kurtz, Nyberg, Tillart, Mills and The Okanagan Urban Aboriginal Health Research Collective [OUAHRC], 2008; Romans, Forte, Cohen, Du Mont and Hyman, 2007; Walker, Logan, Jordan and Campbell, 2004). Aboriginal peoples' health and well-being are impacted by family violence, embedded in socio-cultural, historical, political and economic contexts that often lead to family denigration, homelessness, crimes, incarceration, homicide and suicide (Campbell, 2002; Dion Stout, 2009; Vedan, 2002; Wuest, Ford-Gilboe, Merritt-Gray and Berman, 2003). The violence spectrum has its roots in Aboriginal historical experiences of colonization by Western settlers beginning in 1492, which must be adequately understood in order to restore wholeness, trust and safety to Aboriginal families and community lives.

Despite such strong foundations, according to this study's participants few community agencies are designed, willing, and/or able to provide the instrumental knowledge and practices necessary for the well-being of Aboriginal families in urban contemporary times. However, WAVS does impart such inherent teachings. The organization has been providing services to Vancouver, BC since 1998 and is a rarity in Canada in that it innovatively brings together Aboriginal men *and* women with trained facilitators to impart and to emphasize cultural teachings, thus helping its members (people attending WAVS) to interpret the reasons they find themselves engaging in oppressive and violent practices. The agency's unique mandate is culturally-based, operating on the core belief that healing and wellness are best achieved by acquisition and restoration of

traditional Aboriginal customs and approaches. To better understand such a rich mission overview I propose two key research inquiries.

## 1.6 Research Questions

My/Our research involves an in-depth historical and present-day analysis of WAVS, inclusive of exploring its violence intervention model; members' perceptions and experiences about WAVS; and ultimately, how policy changes can be made to enhance the outreach capabilities of the agency to end family violence. Aboriginal philosophies and perspectives about living within and being a part of nature's elements (land, fire, water and air), have and still do, guide Indigenous peoples' intrinsic ideologies of health and healing. In an urban setting like Vancouver and to some extent, its outlying suburban districts, traditional guidance is demonstrated by a number of traditional practices. Indigenous and Western methodological paradigms can positively shape Aboriginal peoples' health. This particular cultural fusion is complex, not easy to establish and difficult to maintain. Therefore, the main object of our study has been to explore ways that WAVS, as a contemporary healthcare provider, uses traditional/cultural practices that facilitate healing from violence in many of its members' lives. Guiding questions are:

1. How does WAVS articulate and conceptualize its cultural components and their importance of being implemented and received as an intervention model for healing from family violence?
2. How does the WAVS intervention model impact and support members wishing to heal from both their intergenerational and contemporary perceptions and experiences of family?

On the whole, I seek to best understand how WAVS members and facilitators heal from past familial violent traumas and seek healthier beginnings or traverse the 'Red Road', a path of wellness, to which I have heard many Aboriginal peoples refer. As a more global exemplar, Dave Baldrige, a member of the Cherokee Nation attending the 2010 "Healing Our Spirits Worldwide" conference, reminded his audience, 'Mainstream healthcare providers refer to their work as *best* practices—we Indigenous peoples call it *wise* practices' (original emphasis).

## 1.7 Relational Ethics

*I invite my close friends and mentors, Roberta Price of Coast Salish, Snuneymuxw and Cowichan Tribe and Musqueam Elder, Rose Point, (November 18, 1933 ~ July 2, 2012), to lunch. Beyond planning a lunch between friends, I am also following traditional Aboriginal protocol<sup>2</sup> by asking Rose her permission and blessing upon my doctoral studies. The land-based origin of our collaborative relationships between the University of British Columbia and greater community members is situated on unceded ancestral Musqueam Territory. Aboriginal protocol and relational ethics strongly intimate that I respectfully acknowledge this positionality, ask for and honour Elder guidance. During our visit Rose places her hand on my forearm, looks into my eyes and informs me: ‘There is a word called ‘discourse’—go learn what this means so that you can find the right words to speak up; to say what and why some things are not acceptable; and to speak about what you believe in.’ (Personal Field Note, June 17, 2009)*

It is upon Elders Rose and Roberta’s initial guidance and the many respectful WAVS members and participants from whom I continue to learn, that this dissertation primarily rests. The relational ethics practices on which I rest my work are the “4 Rs” of Indigenous research: Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibility” first articulated by Verna Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt. The authors advocate the need for universities as educational systems to develop a student- and/or participant-centered approach that “respects [study participants] for who they are that is relevant to their view of the world that offers reciprocity in their relationships with others and that helps them exercise responsibility over their own lives” (1991, p. 13). Further, I include a 5th R that has surfaced throughout my doctoral work thus far—Relationality—honouring intertwined relationships in multiple commonsensical ways in our dynamic world today.

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<sup>2</sup> In the context of this particular event, Aboriginal protocol is about the social and the personal: inviting (with up to a month’s notice) Elders for opening and closing prayers, blessings, at meetings and ceremonies and ensuring their travel to and from events. Protocol is also about respect and the appropriate amount of honourarium gifted to them for their time and wisdom.

Application of the 5R's to ethically-sound relationships is also supported within New Zealand's six components of *Kaupapa Māori*, which means 'by *Māori* for *Māori*'. These practices are: face to face participant-researcher meetings; looking, listening and learning; showing respect towards people; generous reciprocal sharing of knowledges; awareness of cultural safety in healthcare practices; and respectful discussion and dissemination of collaboratively learned health knowledge as outlined by Linda Smith in 1999 and by Kataraina Pipi and colleagues in 2004. I further discuss these *Māori* protocols in chapter 3. A class student of mine from the Native Education College, describes respect in this way: 'Showing respect is the basic law of life. Treat the child to the oldest Elder with respect at all times' (2011). Vine Deloria Jr. (1994) says of ethics, they "flow from the ongoing life of the community and are virtually indistinguishable from the tribal or communal customs" (p. 68).

Being ethically responsible to this project and the participants who graciously become a part of it, I demonstrate five principles for building and sustaining ethically-sound relationships. First, I *respect* the storytellers for their experiences and perceptions of violence and the ways in which they learn from WAVS without fear, shame and judgment. Second, I hold firm participants' newfound ways of honouring their non-violent spirits by accepting and practicing traditional teachings in culturally- *relevant*, contemporary living. Third, within the opportunity to watch WAVS members and participants gain pride about the color of their skin; knowledge about their culture and familial histories; and self-esteem despite past and present colonial oppression, I find ways to return to them more than what they share with me. Fourth, I act upon my *responsibility* towards participants by keeping their familial stories alive, dynamic and ever-in-motion through respectful, relevant, reciprocal and responsible disseminations of our collective Indigenous knowledges. Last, I remain tentative to honouring participants and my instinctive non-mysterious *relationships* as relating to or characterized by, our interconnected heritage/s. I close this section with a meeting field note that encompasses all of the ethical Rs to which I refer:

*Energy in the room is not as strong tonight, I feel it in the introduction circle where facilitator, Joe, passes around a feather and asks everybody, the one holding the feather at that time (respect), to introduce his or her name, home community, their First Nations ancestry (relationality) and then give a feeling word—are you happy, sad, anxious, energetic—just a one word description of yourself. That's how the WAVS evenings begin (relevance). Many, many people say they are feeling tired tonight. I have to say, I am too. I have*

*difficulties because my energy is low. Lately it's been tough to go all the way across town to the meetings but I do (reciprocity). I have a responsibility; I have to get my act together and get over there.* (Group Meeting Field Note, September 27, 2010)

Below is a visual representation of the relational ethics that I incorporate into my work.

**Figure 1.1:** The 5 Rs of Indigenous Research Ethics (IREs)





## 1.8 Sequence

I subdivide my dissertation into seven chapters. Readers may note that unlike a traditional thesis where chapters 1 or 2 commonly reveal an extensive literature review I disperse literature learnings throughout the entire dissertation and position participants' voices along side academically published text. About literature, Smith (1999) guides my greater considerations:

In addition to this literature, however, are the stories, values, practices and ways of knowing which continue to inform indigenous pedagogies. In international meetings and networks of indigenous peoples oracy, debate, formal speech making, structured silences and other conventions which shape oral traditions remain a most important way of developing trust, sharing information, strategies, advice, contracts and ideas. (p. 14)

Likewise, neither do I restrict participant-voices to the more commonly associated chapter placements of 'findings' and 'discussions'. Rather, I position their invaluable contributions throughout where I deem culturally-and contextually fitting.

In Chapter 2, I offer a broad reflection of Aboriginal worldviews or Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), particularly as they more narrowly relate to family violence, healing and balanced wellness. Western theories and intervention practices of family violence are prolific throughout our dominant societal notions of health, healing and well-being. This is a given. Nevertheless, I do not position Indigenous theories and practices as completely adversarial to Western ways. Warriors Against Violence Society is indexical of a more culturally-appropriate fusion of these two health paradigms. Joe, WAVS facilitator, reminds me, *It is wise to learn Western ways too, so that when we also know Indigenous knowledge, we can be stronger in both* (Guidance Committee Field Note, October 2, 2009). Warriors Against Violence Society includes historical to present-day expressions of need, strengths, challenges and future legacy. The program seeks to ensure that violence and abuse are not recycled into future generations.

The Indigenous methodological approach to healing through Aboriginal storytelling makes up the foundational weight of Chapter 3. There I share a fresh vantage point of need/less validity of actions that encompass the hearts and minds of many First Nations

peoples. I intuit that Aboriginal ways of being include a wealth of personal perspectives, specifically, the symbolic 'Medicine Wheel' of balanced living and Aboriginal storytelling as a sound Indigenous methodological approach to effective research relationships with, for and by Indigenous peoples for the benefit of contemporary healing and future generational harmony. Lastly, I include some of the methodological tensions I experienced throughout the project.

Chapters 4 and 5 show how our research/participant personalities, experiences and interconnectedness merge together. Of significance may be their respective titles; 'WAVS Teachings' and 'WAVS Members' Learnings', terms that sidestep the norm of categorizing scholarly 'findings' and 'discussions'. Although the significance of WAVS life-altering contributions may seem universal—an outcry to end violence (primarily perpetrated against women and children) based on respectful and relevant ethnicity standards—it is more than ever, vital to the richness of diverse worldviews in which we live.

A worldview is important because it is the filter system behind the beliefs, behavior and actions of people. It is the tacit infrastructure people use for their beliefs, behavior and relationships. Two persons with differing worldviews can look at or experience the same event and come away with very different interpretations. (First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS): The Next Generation of Community-Based Research, First Nations Information Governance Committee, 2009, p. 1)

In chapter 6, when discussing the implications of all that participants have shared with me, I signify and merge three approaches to self-health and healing: 1) Total person that encompasses all levels of individuality—body, mind, heart and spirit; 2) Total health that includes wholistic, interconnected, inclusive, interrelated and interactive wellness; and 3) Total environment in ways that maintain healthy relationships with our living environment. In a resounding, unified voice, participants declare that family is the impetus for change and an area of first priority.

Finally, it is in Chapter 7 that I re/affirm study recommendations, goals, tangible practices that do and could, greatly assist First Nations peoples who endure familial violence. I discuss what I consider to be the study's successes and limitations and then interpretively revisit the vital needs of Aboriginal peoples either experiencing or healing from

family violence, both narrowly within the context of WAVS as an effective First Nations intervention program and more broadly as destined to help more people, should the agency's successful approaches be implemented in other community-based facilities.

## 1.9 Writing On Behalf Of Participants

I briefly introduce participants with their self-chosen names: Gerry, Freda, Patrick, Donna, Melanie, Terry and Ryan are/were WAVS members presently attending the program at the time of our conversations together. David, Michael, Patsy and M. (known to friends by her nickname), are past WAVS attendees. Guiding Elder Roberta Price, Millie, Stephanie and Stuart are sharing circle participants, while lastly, Joe and Joyce Fossella and Dan and Gail Parker are/were the original co-founders and co-facilitators of the agency. Leslie Nelson became a co-facilitator in the fall of 2010 and Bruce Wood is the former program designer of the Change of Seasons Program (1992-2006) on *Squamish Nation* territory in North Vancouver or *across the waters* as Joe and Dan frequently denote and give credit for saving their lives. I am grateful to all 22 participants for their individual and collective contributions. The date-range in which participants and I met and digitally recorded our conversations falls between December 2010 and June 2011.

Readers may note my extensive endeavours to narrate both past and present experiences in the 'first person' present tense. This practice stems from my skills as a poet, short-fictionist and essayist, whereby I hone my writing abilities of creating strong immediacy between my readers and myself. Whether a topic is benign or disturbing, I ensure as much as possible that neither my readers nor I find anywhere to run or to hide. Through immediacy we are interfaced with the narrative moment of both tragic and triumphant life-altering events. Through this dissertation together as author, participants and readers we can better witness a present connectedness with one another. Like the Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (2001) shares and I too believe,

The past is always there, accessible. If we look deep into the present moment, we see the past and the future in it. The insight of interbeing also applies to time. We see that the present is made up of non-present elements, that is, of the past and the future. (p. 45)

As is expected in academe I reference those scholars who have published before me with double quotation marks. However, embedded in participant and researcher contributions are single quotes because no matter my attention to detail, both participant and my personal comments—although hold the appearance of being a primary source, are in fact secondary, if not multiple ones—they have traveled through a digital recorder, my transcriptionist and my listening abilities, typed formatting and lastly, deep contemplation. Further, I denote all participant and researcher-field note voices in italics in order to give prominence to their contextual value and to relieve extensive amounts of single quotation marks wherever possible.

## 1.10 Closing Discussion

From the beginning there were drums, beating our world rhythms—the booming, never-failing tide on the beach, the 4 seasons, gliding smoothly, one from the other; when the birds come, when they go, the bear hibernating for his sleep. Unfathomable the way, yet all too perfect time. Watch the beating in your wrist—a precise pulse beat of life's Drum—with loss of timing, you are ill. (Jimilee Burton [Ho-Chief Nee], 1974, cited in Jean, 2002)

The need for a booming, precise pulse beat of healing is transparent in the following story where WAVS Facilitator Leslie is well into many years of healthier ways of living. He talks of his current struggles of envisioning impending violence, an ingrained survival mode, even if mundanely parked outside a local grocery store:

*Leslie was putting groceries in the back of his trunk and saw three guys walking across the parking lot towards him. He automatically, unconsciously, began 'sizing them up' and deciding, 'What have I got here if I need it? Okay, I've got a can of food I can use as a weapon. I've got a bottle of cooking oil that could be turned into a weapon—that I could use to protect myself.' He also said he was envisioning the bruises, the blood, the carnage while having a mental rehearsal of how he could get ready to hurt them before they hurt him. The kids, the guys, they were just walking by but Leslie talked about how combative thoughts have been bothering him lately and he really wants to*

*give it up and let go of it, to give his mind permission to stop sizing people up and stop visualizing preparedness for violence.* (Group Meeting Field Note, March 28, 2011)

Whether we are men or women, researchers or participants, facilitators or members, the appropriate community support at the right time in Aboriginal peoples' lives is needed to facilitate healthy change. Although I use the terms 'wholism' and 'wellness' throughout the dissertation, I recognize that words and their attached notions such as, 'health', 'healing', 'trauma', 'oppression', 'marginalize', 'spirituality', 'emotionality', 'physicality', 'intellectuality' and/or even 'violence' and 'abuse' can hold different meanings for different people. My intent is not to essentialize these lexicons but to communicate on behalf of WAVS, the community and the participants in the best ways that I must, to responsibly discuss the multitude of relevancies that I/We learn throughout this project/process.

An Elder at the 2010 "Healing our Spirits Worldwide" conference in Hawaii told his audience, 'This is not about intellect. It is about soul.' I interpret this to mean our struggles, our lives are not merely about how smart we can be or what activities and distinct choices in which we engage. They are about who we really are within our true purpose, our integrity and the ways in which we demonstrate our attitudes and actions. The Elder continued, 'There has to be a new sales plan for us and for our children. In the last two to three hundred years something has gone terribly wrong.'

As I begin to pick up the pieces from walls of residual violence that tumble in denial and then downwards in disarray, as denoted in my opening poem, I realize that my 'sales pitch' can frequently be found in my writing. Readers may soon note my storytelling nature, adaptive and relational approaches to life, particularly the participants' lives as we intersect within this project. I allow such relationships to be both definable and malleable as we share and shift the roles of participant, researcher and storyteller interchangeably by demarcating both participant-contributions and my inter-connective storied thoughts with *italics*.

Surrounding text remains in regular font style. Relationally, as interconnected pluralistic voices, I begin incorporating participant storytelling as early as Chapter 2. Returning to the above Elder's concern that something is indeed wrong, I whole-heartedly agree. Something, somewhere, amid Western mainstream living, the very nature, the false acceptance of and the diminishment of family violence is not working—we need to find a different way. As this study reveals, Warriors Against Violence Society offers a positive perspective towards this new way.

## Chapter 2: Indigenous and Western Theoretical Systems

*As I begin walking toward the campus village, I see a coyote in the near distance trotting along the perimeters of our parking lot that is surrounded by town houses. He seems to be looking for an opening where he can jog across the street into Pacific Spirit Park; but the evergreen bushes that he would butt his nose into had fencing was behind them too. I watch Coyote, seemingly a little bit lost and a little bit on the prowl for his home habitat and wonder why he presents himself to me today. What lessons am I to learn from him? I think he brings forth a witnessing experience for me, himself perhaps feeling boxed-in and apprehensive or anxious and trying to find where he belongs. Sometimes such searches end perfectly and right away, other times they take twists and turns and nuances of finding our ways.*

(Personal Field Note, April. 29, 2011)

### 2.1 Context

Coyote, in all likelihood, is not at all confined and anxious in working his way home amongst the low-lying trees. Similar to him, I need to be stronger in this way, more aware of where I am going today. I've no doubt he'll find his way home and more importantly, he likely has no concerns in these moments either. He is confident and purposeful, knowing exactly where he is meant to be. Similarly, Indigenous knowledges (IK) and Indigenous methodologies (IM) are never still in time, in context or in the solidity of confidence (Archibald, 2008; Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Cole, 2006; Cajete, 2000; Kondrat, 2002; Marsden, 2006; Mehl-Madrona, 2005). Kawagley and Barnhardt (1999) believe "recognition of cultural systems as being dynamic and ever-changing in response to new conditions has enormous implications for the sustainability of indigenous communities ..." (p. 137).

Zen philosophy has taught me to maintain mindful awareness throughout even the most basic of daily activities:

At dressing time, put on your clothes. When you must walk...walk.  
When you must sit...sit. Just follow your ordinary actions in ordinary  
life, do not concern yourself with the search for enlightenment.

When tired, lie down. The foolish mind will laugh at you but the wise man will understand. (Lee, 2000, p. 52)

Indigenous worldviews, similar to Eastern philosophies like Zen and Buddhism, also relationally unite our everyday-personal tasks with universal wisdoms. While I do not present any new theoretical perspectives at this early time in my scholarly career—I do build on the integrity of Indigenous knowledges and strive for my Indigenous collaborative research to find its own ways of being in both academe and our greater community.

My intent in this theoretical chapter is to roam the landscapes of traditional, contemporary and future Indigenous theory and healing practices, particularly within the realm of understanding and healing from family violence. Theories fit not only the historical times in which they were created but also the contemporary times in which they are re/considered to best understand our lives. More importantly, theories can remain adaptive rather than constrictive. As a photograph hobbyist, I have come across Edward Weston's book, "Aperture Masters of Photography" (1932) in which he endorses pragmatic theoretical fluidity.

I never try to limit myself by theories ... If I am interested, amazed, stimulated to work ... I do not fear logic, I dare to be irrational or really never consider whether I am or not. This keeps me fluid, open to fresh impulse, free from formulae [and] open to any fresh impulse, fluid. (pp. 38 and 46).

Whether freeing or limiting, academic or participant-based, theories throughout this dissertation showcase a particular theme, unpacking and understanding the Aboriginal wholeness of health as we journey towards it. To date, alongside the participants' stories, the document *Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada: Prepared for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation* by Michael Bopp, Judie Bopp and Phil Lane Jr. (2003) has keenly facilitated my broadest spectrum of learning about the complexities of family violence that occurs within many Aboriginal families. A synthesis of Bopp et al.'s report suggests the sheer volume of needs to unpack, to bracket in order to fully understand the multiple complexities of Aboriginal peoples' experiences of violence. The authors succinctly outline that Aboriginal family violence and abuse

- Is a multi-factorial social syndrome and not simply an undesirable behavior;
- Resides within Aboriginal individuals, families and community relationships, as well as within social and political dynamics;
- Typically manifests itself as a regimen of domination that is established and enforced by one person over one or more others, through violence, fear and a variety of abuse strategies;
- Is usually not an isolated incidence or pattern but is most often rooted in intergenerational abuse;
- Is almost always linked to the need for healing from historical traumas;
- Is allowed to continue and flourish because of the presence of enabling community dynamics, which as a general pattern, constitutes a serious breach of trust between the victims of violence and abuse and the whole community; and
- The entire syndrome has its roots in Aboriginal historical experience, which must be adequately understood in order to be able to restore wholeness, trust and safety to the Aboriginal family and community life. (p. ix)

The above web of awareness of culturally-sensitive and relevant significances, interventions, recommendations and health policy re/writings propel me towards a powerful comprehension about fluid time and intergenerational connectedness vital to Aboriginal peoples' health and well-being in Canada today. Nevertheless, I find myself curious. How can I presently explore ancestral, contemporary and future knowledges and practices all at once? Within the crevices of my thought processes and writing, I can cautiously explicate a response. Ancestral guidance, friends, Indigenous scholars and mentors like my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, assist me. Authentic Indigenous research means:

honouring past, present and future in interpretive and analytical research processes including historical references and intergenerational discourse; honouring the interconnectedness of all life and the multi-dimensional aspects of life on the Earth and in the community research design and implementation; and honouring the spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual aspects of the person and the community in research protocols, methodologies and analyses. (Archibald, 1997, p. 15)



Indigenous scholars who also honour our interconnectedness and how our present lives and research philosophies mirror the wellness of our futures as Aboriginal peoples include Battiste (2000), Cole (2006), Gill (2003), Holmes (2000) and Kenny (1998). Within my own learnings about Indigenous, Eastern and Western knowledges, I intuitively trust and metaphorically borrow, discover, learn, understand, interpret and honour the relational ancient/ancestral and contemporary knowledges that assist me, throughout this dissertation. I traverse such intersectional terrains as Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and health; Western Knowledge (WK) and health; healing in the context of urban-living Aboriginal peoples and family violence; and the Medicine Wheel<sup>3</sup> as a symbolic framework for healing and balanced wellness.

One participant declares about her own healing journey, *A warrior is finding that strength to bring back our traditions* (Group Meeting Field Note, Melanie, March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010). As spiritually connected warriors, numerous participants and I embark upon the Medicine Wheel. Together we explore some of the many traditional/contemporary ways in which WAVS assists its mostly urban Aboriginal members to heal from family violence by providing culturally-relevant tools to guide them towards diminishing violence within their families and communities. Background context about family violence, specifically among some Aboriginal peoples requires not only past awareness and documentation but also contemporary understanding.

Present reality dictates that extreme numbers of Aboriginal peoples and their wellness paths remain marred in family violence primarily because of cultural loss. As many as eight out of ten Aboriginal women have experienced violence and rates for partner/spousal abuse are significantly higher among Aboriginal women than Aboriginal men and among non-Aboriginal peoples (Statistics Canada, 2006, p. 9) and in 2009 Aboriginal females who reported spousal violence were about three times more likely than Aboriginal males (34% versus 10%) to report that they had been sexually assaulted, beaten, choked or threatened with a gun or a knife by their partner or ex-partner in the previous five years (The

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<sup>3</sup> The Medicine Wheel is a pro-active and empowering approach to social intervention with individuals as well as a self-help tool. James Waldram (1993) proposes “the name symbolic healing to identify this varied and complex form of therapy, which research suggests is neither intrinsically nor generically incompatible with other forms of healing and medicine” and that the “central focus of Aboriginal awareness and spirituality programming [inside Canadian prison institutions], as well as the parent institutions, is the work of Elders” (Waldram, 1993, p. 346-347). WAVS’ philosophy of balanced wellness is also symbolically-based on the Medicine Wheel.

General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization (2009). Also recorded is that Aboriginal people tend to be highly re/presented as victims and perpetrators of crime as well as among incarcerated persons (p. 6). No matter the historical reasons for contestations not being acted upon, WAVS demonstrates today, how violent authority can and should be challenged.

Joe Fossella and Dan Parker, co-founders of WAVS, began their healing journeys and commitment to work with their communities after witnessing, experiencing and then perpetrating violence in their own families. They soon learned first hand—from unison voices of participating men and their partners—the cultural value of bringing together men and women to re/learn cultural components necessary for healing from family violence within Aboriginal communities. According to White, Suchowierska and Campbell (2004),

Society's ambivalence toward violence in the family is apparent in the various definitions and interpretations of battering and abuse, including physical aggression toward a child or intimate partner, corporal punishment, harsh parenting, non-accidental physical injury, assault and crimes against women. (p. Supplement 8)

WAVS provides its members with historical and culturally-traditional understandings. It also explains present-day knowledge about where much of their anger and negative behaviours originate, such as institutional rules from generational forced attendance at residential schools. Newly founded missionary churches began residential schools in Canada in the 1840s. They were later institutionalized by the Indian Act of 1876, which sanctioned Canadian government personnel (Ministry of Indian Affairs) to forcibly remove Aboriginal children from their homes and communities, preventing them from learning basic parenting skills, cultural traditions and their Native way of life. Many others were subject to physical and mental abuse, which strongly affected their self-worth as they grew up and attempted to parent their own children (Chrisjohn et al., 2006; Lester-Smith (Hill), 2008). Participants reflect upon their residential school experiences in chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

On behalf of Warriors youth members, many of whom may be first and second generation residential school survivors of older relatives who did attend residential schools, Ryan, iterates, *They're all going through anger in their lives, negative situations that are happening right now. The abuse is happening right now [to and around them]*. The youth

group leader seems to have a good understanding of intervention and sensitivity towards the complexities of being a youth and dealing with violence. Working with Indigenous youth presents challenges in healing since so many young people disproportionately take their own lives (Lester-Smith and Wanyenya, 2011); the positivity is not lost. Warriors' youth are committed to being alive, attending their youth group and facilitating their own healing, as is discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

## 2.2 The Grandmothers Are With Us

There are multiple ways in which Indigenous knowledge can be re/presented, such as through family, community, work and the university. For instance, on days that my personal methodology of health is not working as effectively as I wish, I think of Marcelle Gareau, a *Métis* woman I met in Ottawa during the 2009 Aboriginal Policy Research Conference. Offering me encouraging words about the completion of my Master's of Arts study, *Aboriginal Women Living with HIV/AIDS: An Empowerment Perspective*, she confirmed, 'The Grandmothers were with you' (Personal Field Note, March, 2009). I return to her gentle wisdom as my own health challenges ebb and flow like a river's brand new rivulets passing through at every moment in time.

Warriors Against Violence Society members are taught an intervention model based on Indigenous, culturally-relevant, traditional healing as primary care. Many, if not most members, seriously relish the traditional/contemporary skills taught to them as meaningful tools with which they can transform their behaviours based on a newfound understanding of the deeply rooted colonial complexities of violence. While there are other family programs in Vancouver that offer anger management skills, WAVS is unique: *We talk about the self, where one comes from, their people, their blood memories* (Joyce Fossella, Personal Communication, January 5, 2010).

Unfortunately, not all First Nations peoples strongly identify with their inner wisdom of individuality, of blood memory and ancestral connected-ness, in the ways that he and the other co-facilitators do, as noted by Joe, lead facilitator.

There are a big number of different First Nations living here in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver and we help them try and find their own culture, their own spirituality. We respect all ways of life. When the 28 sessions are over, sometimes some of the group men come back and

they've actually found out where they are from, you know, go back and visit a family member in their own territories. Most of them are stuck and say 'I am just from Vancouver' but at the end of the 28 sessions they are able to identify who they are and where they come from and love themselves for who they are as well. (Warriors Against Violence Society Presents: The Journey, DVD, 2000)

In the above excerpt I find that Joe is not only speaking about the WAVS philosophy and his Elder teachings towards urban Aboriginal community members but also to me as a researcher in the midst of grounding myself. Who am I? Or phrased as an Eastern spiritual-contemplation, what did my face look like before I was born? While I may not yet be able to answer what I truly looked like before the present, I can describe my groundedness in other ways. For example, Métis maternal grandmothers are known as *Kokum* in *Michif*, a linguistic blend of Cree and French Métis (Campbell, 1973). Leona Juliene Gauthier/Simard, my great-*Kokum*; Germaine René Marguerite Marie Simard/Ouston), my *Kokum*; and my mother, Juanita Jane Ouston/Dennison were all excellent cooks. Fortunately, I inherited their culinary gifts. I was raised with many intergenerational recipes such as Baked Beans; Steak and Kidney Pie; *Gissantes* or *Les Grandpères* (Stew and Dumplings); *Tourtière* (Christmas French Meat Pies); *La Pouchi* or *Pouchine au Sac* or *son-of-a-bitch-in-a-sack* (my mom's treasured Christmas Pudding); and *Soupe aux Pois* (Pea Soup), all of which I more recently found in Barkwell, Durion and Hourie's book, *Métis Legacies* (2006).

To illustrate a more recent experience of grandmotherly in-spiritedness I share this brief note.

*I require a day surgery procedure and am being put to sleep under general anesthesia. Preparation guidelines dictate that a wedding band may be worn if it cannot be removed. Interestingly, the one ring I can not remove due to my joints swelling from being fervently worked on, is not my marriage ring but an antique one on my right hand that my grandmother had made from her wedding set diamonds after the deaths of my grandfather from an operation and my step-grandfather from suicide. I smile in understanding—the ring I wear through surgery is my grandmother's—she and the blessings of her Ancestors, stay with me. 'The Grandmothers are with me', I spiritually remind myself. (Personal Field Note, February 23, 2012)*

It is with our ancestral grandmothers that I seek to understand and to contribute to Indigenous theoretical and methodological practices.

## **2.3 An Overview of Indigenous and Western Philosophical Worldviews**

For participants and their families the cycle of good health is indeed returning. Within the greater theoretical framework of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) lie the worldviews upon which Indigenous peoples base their ways of knowing, such as through Aboriginal storytelling, beliefs, values and actions (Archibald, Jovel, McCormick, Vedan and Thira, 2006; Brown, 2004; Castellano, 2000; Graveline, 2002; Marsden 2004; Mehl-Madrona, 2005). Although diversity exists between many tribal, clan, bands and nations of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, there is a common worldview among us that includes body-mind-emotional-spiritual wholism and connection to nature and its connection to healing and wellness (Dei, 2000; Durie, 2004; Ermine 2004; Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991, WAVS Facilitator Manual, 2003). Eastern wisdom is also helpful to understand Indigenous conceptualizations of wholism. Zen wisdom, for example, encompasses the experiential and the reflective aspects of knowledge, rather than predominantly relying on theoretical perspectives. As a researcher I find myself in constant motion of seeking a place in which both can compliment one another (Dumoulin and Heinrich, 2005). Zen considerations about wholism are highlighted by Lee (2000):

In Chinese and Japanese thought, there is only one character and one word for heart and mind: the two are the same. It is easy to see the center of our bodies, *hara* in Japanese, as the center of our being. It is a starting point for our feelings and contentment, which radiate outward like the rings of water growing ever larger from a stone dropped into the stillness of water. (p. 32)

A worldview is typically more comprehensive than a lens through which to view a particular task, yet as such a perceptive tool of insight, it is a significant starting point. Ray Barnhardt and Oscar Kawagely (2005) speak about worldviews more globally:

Indigenous peoples throughout the world have sustained their unique worldviews and associated knowledge systems for millennia, even while undergoing major social upheavals as a result of transformative forces beyond their control. Many of the core values, beliefs and practices associated with those worldviews have survived and are beginning to be recognized as having an adaptive integrity that is as valid for today's generations as it was for generations past. (p. 8)

Leroy Little Bear (2000) adds to this discussion of Indigenous core values although he does cast a warning against essentializing any particular worldview:

No one has a pure worldview that is 100% Indigenous or Eurocentric; rather, everyone has an integrated mind, a fluxing and ambidextrous consciousness, a precolonized [and a decolonized] consciousness that flows into a colonized consciousness and back again. (p. 85)

Unfortunately, I cannot be certain to whom the author specifically refers as “everybody”—those who have experienced colonialism and/or to those who have not. Therefore, I believe he speaks about people in general, that all peoples and our guiding philosophies can never be fully “100% Indigenous or Eurocentric”. Exact in/exclusivity would trouble my/our standpoint throughout this study of our interconnectedness and of our capabilities for understanding, adaptability and relationality to one another. In their colonial/identity considerations, Little Bear, Barnhardt and Kawagely each address some of the fluctuating tensions when defining the basic premises of an Indigenous worldview in terms of fluid colonialism. On the one hand, I agree with Little Bear that our worldviews are never completely pure. Yet on the other, I remain cautious about scholars who quickly dismiss worldviews as ideological essentialism.

Ignoring worldviews and their wisdoms becomes further salient in the realization that contemporary healthcare conditions have been shaped for over a century by imposed colonial practices, policies and politics (Kelm, 1998; RCAP, 1996a; Waldram, Herring and Young, 1995). The misguidance of colonial healthcare continues to be evident in various ways, particularly through explicit and implicit discriminatory practices and structural constraints that marginalize many Aboriginal peoples from the dominant healthcare system (Kondrat, 2002). I speak of marginalize and/or marginalization, not to imply some inherent

characteristics associated with particular people or groups but rather, to refer to people who have been most affected by historical, structural and social inequities. Frequently these are people who also experience related disadvantages stemming from intellectual health, substance mis/use, economic conditions or stigmatizing conditions such as HIV/AIDS and issues arising from profound social inequities. Likewise, Dodson and Struthers (2005) interpret marginalization as “the process by which persons are peripheralized on the basis of their identities, associations, experiences and environments” (p. 339). Finally, Berg, Evans, Fuller and The Okanagan Urban Aboriginal Health Research Collective (2007) note that by extension, “...the marginalization of Aboriginal people in research settings had the somewhat contradictory effect of further marginalizing urban Aboriginal people” (pp. 402-403). Case in point, a number of studies reveal that Aboriginal women face serious access problems stemming from discrimination based on ethnicity, gender and class (Benoit, Carroll and Chaudry, 2003; Dion Stout, Kipling and Stout, 2001; Hill, 2008). As a result, many First Nations peoples do not access mainstream health. Instead, they prefer to access health needs through their local Friendship Centres where they are less apt to be judged and marginalized and more likely to be understood and supported with cultural safety and sensitivities by staff workers (Kurtz, Nyberg, Van Den Tillaat, Mills and The Okanagan Urban Aboriginal Health Research Collective (OUAHRC), 2008). In sections 2.4 through 2.8 I discuss in more detail Indigenous health-knowledges and dominant Western health standards of re/address.

## **2.4 Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

Indigenous knowledges or worldviews, are a philosophical framework that promote ancestral and present-day Aboriginal knowledges as vital to Aboriginal peoples' health. Douglas Cardinal and Jeanette Armstrong (1991) teach us,

Knowledge is definite. It is definable. The potential of it is what is vast. You and I can always extend our thinking out there past the definable edge. Out there you can soar like an eagle. Creativity comes from the domain out there, the unknown. Once something is created, it comes into the definable realm of things. (p. 54)

The essence of worldviews, from which Cardinal and Armstrong make meaning of their/our worlds, is not only a commonality between diverse Indigenous peoples: it is also of timeless value. Indigenous worldviews include contemporary balanced and harmonious health and ancestral guidance towards our well-being. Indigenous worldviews have existed since time immemorial (Archibald, 2008; Castellano, 2000; Dodson and Struthers, 2005). Health worldviews are relevant to and effective in Aboriginal communities because they honor the diversity, concerns and suggestions of all Aboriginal peoples, even the most silent and marginalized of voices.

An Aboriginal conceptualization of health is in many ways, philosophically different than the prevailing euro-centric one. Chief Leonard George of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation describes how he merges his Indigenous philosophical views with metaphorical, yet seemingly concrete applications. In Archibald (2008), he explains:

I try to use old philosophies as a tool. I call it learning how to become a hunter of the city, using the old philosophy of the hunter in the forest and the respect that he had and using only what you need for that day and taking it out, bringing it back and sharing it with as many people whose needs will be suited by it. This changed my perspective on the city. It is a wonderful resource then—go in and hunt and get things out and bring it back home. (p. 48)

WAVS exemplifies this notion of resource-sharing through their traditional knowledges re/appropriated for contemporary pragmatic times. They too, share with as many people as possible. Chief Leonard George's adaptation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems to suit modern urban living is a testament to the timeless nature of the beliefs upon which Aboriginal peoples have thrived and adapted. IKS, most often learned through the traditional teachings of Elders (an example of linking the past with the present and forward on into the future) is experiential. It is about the land, survival and sustainability. It involves the relationship between people and the environment in which they live. While Indigenous Knowledges might be described as somewhat abstract, it is this very fluidity that remains the foundation of IK as an authentic, evolving, sustainable paradigm. Indigenous peoples' perceptions of wellness encompass notions of wholism whereby a balance of the four interconnected quadrants of living—the spiritual, the emotional, the physical and the intellectual realms—is sought. In this way IK is considered a process, not a product (or an



artifact). It is about relationships with the self, family, community and the greater environment in which people live. In my own life IK has shown itself throughout my dreams, mentorships, intuition, connectedness with other Aboriginal peoples, nature, spirituality, moral tensions, protocols and responsibilities and my writings, as is evidenced throughout this dissertation. It is important to include IK in health considerations that respectfully benefit the multiple diversities between First Nations peoples and their unique social, structural and historical realities. For example, the following *Māori* collaborators investigate how the values in research are used to respectfully conduct research. Within the “*Māori* and Iwi Provider Success” research project they reveal key considerations helpful to my work with WAVS: Firstly, the importance of ensuring survival and revival of culture and secondly, the centrality of self-determining cultural well-being.

#### **2.4.1 A Māori Example of Indigenous Relational Theory and Practice**

Linda Tuiwai Smith (1999) and other Māori scholars discuss *Kaupapa Māori* practices that guide *Māori* researchers when learning about and collaborating with Indigenous people and their health, healing and well-being (Pipi, Cram, R. Hawke, S. Hawke, Huriwai, Matakai, Milne, Morgan, Tuhaka, Tuuta, International Research Institute for *Māori* and Indigenous Education and The University of Auckland, 2004). As an interwoven thread to Smith and her colleagues, I consider my own relational work as somewhat of a mentored parallel to the authors’ culturally-sensitive guiding principles believing that we can learn from and draw upon *Māori* research as parallel example under the IKS theoretical paradigm.

##### **1. *He Kanohi Kitea* (the seen face)**

Meeting face-to-face is critical because it allows people to use all their senses as complementary sources of processing information. Indigenous peoples have innate sensorial ways (taste, touch, smell, sight, hearing and ancestral intuitiveness) of learning and knowing: knowing for whom their knowledge is best suited, for instance.

##### **2. *Titiro, Whakarongo...Kōrero* (look, listen, speak)**

This practice re/enforces the process whereby the researcher’s role is one of watching, listening, learning and waiting until it is appropriate to speak by helping to show respect and develop trust in the growing relationship between researcher and participant(s).

### **3. *Aroha kit e Tangata*** (respect for people)

Within the *Māori* and Iwi Provider Success (MIPS) project, support and guidance did not come from *kaumātua*<sup>4</sup> directly but from very politically astute and well respected local *Māori* women – the regional coordinators. The engagement of regional coordinators also meant that the MIPS project was responsive to regional differences.

### **4. *Manaaki kit e Tangata*** (sharing and generosity)

This practical value reinforces that Indigenous research must be collaborative and reciprocal. It also acknowledges that learning and expertise exist in both parties. In this *Māori* study, “critical friend[s]” (p. 149), (the regional coordinators) provided feedback by probing and shared information in addition to the researchers who provide assistance by way of reciprocity.

### **5. *Kia Tupato*** (be cautious)

*Kia tupato* is about being culturally safe and reflexive about our “insider/outsider status” (Pipi et al., p. 149). Each examined the research project thoroughly, raised questions about process, integrity and ethics, before engaging with the researchers. They had to be sure that they were the right people to assist and support the researchers and they also had to be confident that this project would benefit their region. The engagement of regional coordinators also meant that the MIPS project was responsive to regional differences.

### **6. *Kaua e Takahia te Mana o te Tangata*** (do not trample the mana of the people)

This last *Māori* principle is about sounding out ideas, disseminating research findings and acquiring community feedback that keeps people informed about research processes and findings. It is also about relational practices and relational ethics. Involvement of the regional coordinators was necessary to maintain credibility within *Māori* communities; they acted as researchers within their region, as well as kept community providers informed on process and findings. (Pipi et al., 2004).

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<sup>4</sup> In *Māori* culture, a *Kaumātua* is an Elder who speaks with honesty and integrity, through his or her words and deeds. For other *Māori* teachings and translations, see <http://www.maori.org.nz/tikanga/default.asp?pid=sp101&parent=104>.

With the commonsensical and ‘good medicine’ of my/our ancestral guidance, I highlight next, how Indigenous inherent knowledges can be understood in both traditional and contemporary ways of healing (i.e. through traditional philosophies and cultural practices) in Vancouver, Canada. Dion Stout (2009) reminds us that understanding life is a journey of nurturing positive Aboriginal self-identities and utilizing ancestral teachings. I now explore ways in which the WAVS organization presents itself to its members and I in similar ways of *Māori* co-learners and co-researchers who have gone before me.

## **2.4.2 My Work as Similar to the Māori Example**

### **1. What and for whom? (the seen face)**

During my first Aboriginal Community Guidance Committee in September 2009, we meet one another’s ‘un/seen faces’. Members ask me to consider the following:

- Focus on the significance of the Aboriginal healing circle (i.e. its very shape in comparison to other gatherings, community agencies and then its layers of meaning);
- Understanding the circle as an entity of trust, authenticity and a method for problem-solving;
- Understand my role at WAVS: Joe and Joyce have reminded me often that if I am to work with them, I am to fully participate as a member of their client-centered healing groups;
- Define the Aboriginal circle in contrast to other circles (non- Aboriginal or other community agencies). Why does the tradition of the Aboriginal circle work? Who leads the circle? How is it led?
- Explore some of the lack of commonsense that many policies and agencies do not exhibit (i.e. the Canadian government names a department, the “British Columbia Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents” but not allow Aboriginal parents and community members to share in its direction); and
- Value western thought as necessary: I keep in mind Joe’s guidance that *it is a good thing to learn those ways too*. (Guidance Committee Field Note, October 2, 2009)

WAVS traditional philosophies and methodologies show that learning ancestral ways of concentrically balanced wholeness positively affects the wellness of past and present clients and their families (community oral testimonies and member evaluation forms).

## **2. Why?** (look, listen, speak)

A primary outcome of my/our study is the discovery of some of the transformative values of policy changes necessary to the well-being of Aboriginal families struggling to heal from domestic violence. By keeping my *What-Who/Why/How/Where/So what/Now what* framework in the forefront of my study methodology I can better manage the integrity and quality of our research and its successful outcomes. The intent of our community collaborative endeavor to reach recommendations based on respectful questions and actions designed also means to affirm, to acknowledge, to support, to validate, to challenge and to clarify (Pipi et al., 2004) health matters related to diminishing violence in Aboriginal families. This is demonstrated through the multitude of programs WAVS is dedicated to providing for its clients. Illustratively, in 2009 the agency partnered with the Urban Aboriginal Youth Association to share funding targeted for the well-being of youth. According to WAVS, “Witnessing [violence] is not necessarily seeing directly, although many more children see the violence than parents think” (WAVS Manual, 2003, p. 45). Ramifications of ‘witnessing’ include social, emotional, physical and intellectual behavioural choices and effects. If we consider the Medicine Wheel as an evolving harmonious theoretical health framework, then a category of each quadrant can commonsensically fit here too. East as social/spiritual, South as emotional, West as physical and North as intellectual/behavioral. Our task remains how might Aboriginal peoples learn and then accomplish a balanced healing journey? WAVS is one such urban Aboriginal service provider that exemplifies an Indigenous traditional path to wholistic healing and health and the fact that one particular Monday meeting night (April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010) became standing room only holds poignancy for me.

## **3. How?** (sharing and generosity)

For its members WAVS devotes large amounts of discussion time about Healing Principles such as safety, responsibility, respect and cooperation. Each of these subheadings has a number of relational points of value that the facilitators impart and

that I explore more fully. Relational and adaptable practices offered at WAVS include teachings about past and present Aboriginal healing methods like understanding the five cornerstone components of *Family of Origin*, *Stress*, *Social/Cultural*, *Unknown Factors*, and *Feelings*, as I have previously discussed. Healing is discussed among WAVS facilitators and clients as recognizing in Aboriginal families defining violence; learning where the contemporary actions of violence originate (predominantly through negative legacies of colonialism); teaching Aboriginal values and traditions; and offering the reclamation and pride of Aboriginal ways of knowing and being.

#### **4. How/Why/Where? (be cautious)**

A balance of expertise is vital to any authentic research, projects in which leaders value sharing collective knowledge and wisdom. Case in point, when I invite members of my Community Committee to guide me throughout my doctoral studies I consider community-diversified roles as imperative to the guidance I might most need. All of my mentors are of Indigenous heritage—Status or Non-Status First Nation and Métis. Their roles and experiences within our urban community include the fields of human resources, social work and executive director; a Vancouver Police Department Liaison Officer; a university graduate-student youth worker; a UBC-graduate psychologist; and traditional teachers and Knowledge Keepers (a community Mentor/Elder and WAVS co-founders and co-facilitators). I would add one key experience about the notion of *where*. In a past study I worked on, the non-Aboriginal principal investigator (PI) of a community-based research study insisted that community advisory team meetings be held in the community. She decided on a specific Downtown Eastside location. The project manager visited the site to confirm appropriateness and capacity and reported that the room on location was the small lobby space just inside the front door that offered no privacy from incoming clients and could not comfortably accommodate more than six people around the table. Despite the best intentions of the post-doctoral team manager the PI insisted. On the day of the meeting the PI was thirty minutes late because she ‘could not find the place’ and at least twelve meeting members arrived and had to literally crawl over and squeeze behind one another throughout the course of the meeting. One attendee later asked me, ‘So, what? Aboriginal people are not allowed to have a comfortable meeting room?’ (Personal Field Note, March 7, 2008).

## **5. So What: Implications** (respect for people)

WAVS has multiple insider/outsider challenges to benefiting the needs of its community, particularly the lack of government funding for family violence services, especially for men's programs. Patriarchal attitudes continue to pervade Aboriginal health politics and healing leadership. Government funding policy-makers, primarily dedicated to women and children have yet to fully understand that traditional Indigenous healing practices must be inclusive of the entire family. Instead it could be argued that they do not have full 'respect for the people' and consequently 'trample on the values of the people'.

## **6. Now What: Recommendations** (do not trample the mana of the people)

The essence of the *Kaupapa Māori* Health Research Paradigm is one of authentic relationality and adaptability. *Māori* research is comprised of Indigenous theoretical and methodological healthcare practices. On Eastern Canadian lands, Cheryl Turton (1997) writes, "The concern for health touche[s] every corner of traditional *Ojibwe* religion, as it pervade[s] *Ojibwe* life" (p. 144). Indigenous wholism and wellness is the necessary and perhaps the only spiritual medicine that is pervasive in a positive sense for Aboriginal peoples to heal from colonial violence and to remain healthy.

## **2.5 The WAVS Philosophy**

All peoples know a lot, one set of people does not know everything. Indigenous Peoples can engage in dialogue, learn from each other and grow stronger as part of a vast diversity of Indigenous peoples and knowledge systems. Through respectful engagement and sharing, generating understanding and appreciation for the diversity of peoples and cultures new ideas form, paradigm shifts occur and networks expand. Webs of sustainable relationships are created. (Cohen, 2010, p. 142)

WAVS introduces a number of interventional 'best practices' whereby members can begin to discover their awareness and sometimes-painful appreciation for generating understanding of oppressively-rooted anger. Included are also wholeness and wellness

within their intervention model of healing. Strides are being made with such teachings as taking personal ownership of the violence one inflicts on another person; building on personal strengths; pragmatically sharing comprehensive familial experiences; traditional humility; cultural teachings; and engaging members' voices by heartfelt demonstrations of trust, confidentiality, listening, understanding and Aboriginal storytelling. By focusing on the sharing/learning traditions of group-meeting sharing circles, members learn ways to heal traditionally, contemporarily and wholistically. "The Helping Circle," for instance, was a counselling program developed by France and McCormick (1997) at the Nation House of Learning at UBC. The model was designed to be culturally-relevant and to combine a number of traditional cultural methods such as the Medicine Wheel, legends and nature with current counselling practices. In many traditional sharing circles, a sacred eagle feather or an Aboriginal carved 'talking stick' is passed around the circle. Customarily, the person holding the sacred item is the only speaker at the time, while all others respectfully listen and remain silent until their turn. When done respectfully, circle participation reflects the basic traditional and philosophical worldview of Aboriginal peoples regardless of whether it is done from a healing perspective and as a teaching approach and as a path to problem solving.

The agency's intervention model rests on the cornerstone that traditional healing practices are paramount to a strong sense of health and wellness. Many Aboriginal peoples believe that First Nations peoples are all spiritually connected in health wellness and disease. David, a participant in this study, explains his own health observations in terms of his seemingly vital spirituality:

*I sacrifice ... I fast twice a year, four days, four nights. And I've always done this for my grandchildren. It's not because I don't have a good life but they understand the culture and that's what it's about. It's not about me trying to get magic or trying to be somebody when I'm not. Maybe the words are strong what I say because I speak the truth... Every year I go sit on a mountain for four days, four nights. I don't eat or drink water. For all the damage I've done in my life, the mistakes. I ask [Creator] if I can release; I ask for forgiveness. I'm not a pretender about spirituality. Spirituality ...*

*even when I was using ... drugging and using, I still went to sweats*<sup>5</sup>.  
(December 7, 2010)

The above Vision Quest explanation is just one personal healing ceremony that can demonstrate an active reclamation of cathartic, spiritual tradition as a powerful force throughout one's life. Another traditional ceremony is the Powwow, transformed into contemporary celebration of wellness. Although some aspects of this connective gathering have been adapted such as setting (depending on land space and/or indoor gymnasiums and halls), fundraising events and monetary competitions, the healing benefits of Powwows remain traditional. They re/present an active pathway to balanced health—as social gatherings and connectedness provide spiritual, intellectual, physical and emotional wellness through song, dance, feasts and traditional regalia making and story sharing.

Other culturally-relevant health practices may include belief in the symbolic Medicine Wheel (MW) teachings encouraged by WAVS inclusive of the four health realms: physical, spiritual, intellectual and emotional aspects of our well-being. Medicine Wheels can be important methods for “looking after ourselves in a well-balanced way and the rewards can be achieved by doing this [i.e., compassion, respect, acceptance, pride, strength, kindness, firmness]” (WAVS Manual, 2003, p. 51). Facilitator, Leslie, designates the Medicine Wheel as a personal tool:

*I've adopted it as a part of my tool kit, so that I use that as something that helps me to stay healthy. It's like if you go to university and you have a university degree that helps to correct a lot of your behaviour in a lifetime, then that's what it is—it's a tool. A very personal tool that you're able to incorporate into your lifetime.* (December 1, 2010)

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<sup>5</sup> Elders suggest being cleansed of any bad feelings, negative thoughts, bad spirits or negative energy—cleansed both physically and spiritually. This is commonly called “smudging,” to burn certain herbs and take the smoke in one's hands and rub or brush it over the body. In Western North America the three plants most frequently used in smudging are sage, cedar and sweetgrass (Lester-Smith (Hill), 2008). Sweat Lodges or Sweats as they are sometimes referred to, are a ceremonial sauna and often an important event in some North American First Nations or Native American cultures. There are several styles of sweat lodges that include a domed or oblong hut or a simple hole dug into the ground and covered with planks or tree trunks. Stones are typically heated in a nearby exterior fire and then placed in a central pit in the ground. Rituals and traditions vary from region to region and from tribe to tribe. They often include prayers, drumming and offerings to the spirit world (Bruchac, 1993; Clark, 2003).



Throughout life we need to examine our 'tool kits' and decide whether the instruments within are beneficial. WAVS offers a model where members can access what learned mechanisms and behaviours they must un/learn in order to create the mind-place to gain newer, more helpful ones for each of our four health quadrants.

To heal means to restore the body to wholeness and soundness. Wounded-recovery also involves a spiritual sense of health and well-being and of 'blood memory' as Holmes (2000) and WAVS co-facilitators suggest. With their assistance I can more fully articulate my perceptions about present-day Indigenous peoples' search for balanced healing through our self(ves), ancestors, family and community members. Participants in McCormick's (1994) dissertation, *The Facilitation of Healing for First Nations people of British Columbia*, identify ten ways Aboriginal peoples can experience healing, all of which can be found in an urban setting in which participants live. My own experiential additions to this list are added in parenthesis.

- Establishing social connections (personal and professional);
- Anchoring oneself in tradition (Elder guidance, beliefs, arts, music, dance);
- Self-Care (diet, exercise, mindfulness, honouring relations with ourselves, traditional medicines, ways of being);
- Expressing feelings and emotions (seeking those what, how and why questions and answers);
- Asking for support from others (as naturally happens in WAVS sharing circles);
- Participation in ceremonies (Sweats, Smudging and other cleansing celebrations);
- Setting goals (attainable and yet challenging ones);
- Helping others (responsibly, so as not to impede our own self-care);
- Gaining an understanding of the problem (what, how, why, impacts and solutions); and
- Learning from a role model (mentors, Elders, educators and traditional teachers).

To facilitate healing from the imperative lack of self/collective connection in many urban Aboriginal peoples, WAVS offers supportive traditional modes like the talking circle. Talking or sharing circles provide a safe and respectful space in which all members are

given the chance to share their points of view with others without fear of criticism or judgment. The circular setting ensures participant respect, encouragement and equality whereby no one person sits at the 'head' or any less meaningful side-positions of a standard boardroom-meeting-style table. Michael, both a participant and a member of my Aboriginal Community Guidance Committee describes WAVS' non-judgmental healing circles in this way: *It's not where you've been but where you are going: that support we give one another in the WAVS groups. It's about the importance of men learning how to communicate* (December 9, 2012). About the safety of the sharing circle, honesty helps the participants. They share stories; they realize they are not alone.

Communal healing can include realizing we are not alone and that practices may vary between diversities of Aboriginal peoples. Traditional Aboriginal community circles/gatherings were meant for solving difficulties and 'humbling ourselves' (Joyce Fossella, Personal Communication, September 29, 2009). For many Aboriginal peoples, urban living creates an inexpressible gap in our selves and our centres of being. It is a kind of knowing and sensing that something is missing but not being able to describe it. Connectedness to other urban First Nations peoples helps to heal this loss. To grow and to know one another and ourselves as engaging community members is to understand ourselves in wholistic ways throughout our past/present/future journeys.

As one particular side-trip I took at Warriors, in March of 2010 I attended their intensive 4-week Facilitator Training course. I mention this as a way of describing in a condensed manner more key components of the WAVS model of violence intervention. Below are my answers to our exam that evening. The original 10 test questions are abbreviated in bold and can also be deduced from my answers.

1. **Meeting check-ins** allow and teach clients to turn inward, to learn new 'feeling' words (to describe their emotions), facilitators can assess if a client needs assistance outside a particular group night if a crisis has been expressed. Check-in also role models for other clients respect, as each one learns to share and to learn from others in the group that they are not alone.
2. **Time-out** is taught as a tool to diffuse moments of anger. To step back, listen to one's cues, triggers, actions, self-talk and to head anger off at the path. A receiver of negative thoughts and impending violence is not the one to call for time-out. They do need to have a control plan in place to be safe at all times

but the goal of time-out is for the offender to learn his/her cues, red flags, etc. and to take responsibility for themselves. Not for their partner to be the one to set a time-out for them.

3. **Rules of time-out** include avoiding all physical labor like chopping wood, boxing bags or seemingly harmless gun target practice in a field. These are all aggressive actions and build up aggression and heightened emotions. They can turn into targets of 'pretend my partner is the source' and therefore the abuser is still aggressively expressing anger towards their partner in a symbolic way. None of these aggressive actions are best for a passive, restful and reflective, self-responsible time-out. Ideas for time-out? Leaving the home, walks, call a friend, cool down, take care of self and reflect on self and other as to what might have escalated a particular situation.
4. **A control plan** means if the party being abused can too, see the situation becoming more real, can have as prep, a quick, safe route to exit the home: a little savings, bus money, personal documents or photocopies, emergency numbers written down or memorized, a change of clothes, a journal about past experiences, etc. To keep in hiding in the home or with parents or with a good friend. A control plan is about everything necessary at a moment's notice for if or when an abused partner needs to leave for safety. And last, knowing the cues: physical escalations, harmful words, name calling, imagining one hurting a person, blaming another for causing the abuser to feel this anger, building up to sweating, high heart rates, misguided thinking.
5. **Emotional cues** include name-calling, bribing, threatening, allowing buttons to be pushed, hitting those buttons in another, belittling and blaming. Spiritual-threats: not acting in good faith, good medicine, denying responsibility for being violent, blaming (if only you do this...I would not get so angry) and threatening of loss of children (if you leave, I or the Ministry will take your kids).
6. **Stress factors leading to violence** can be historical possibilities like residential school, loss of generations of parenting skills, Western

dominance, discrimination, growing up within all of this, racism, witnessing abuse, family history, war, past traumas, learned patriarchal power trips and Western ideas of people being owned, loss of land, family, cultural beliefs and practices, Elder teachings, alcohol and drugs to numb the pain, lack of belonging, following the crowd and not knowing why we are angry. But through taking responsibility of one's own actions, people can find out why and then decide to begin healing.

7. **Self-talk is a cue**, both good and bad. A cue of awareness, can I see my bodily red flags going off, can I sense I need a time out, am I escalating in my negative self talk about my partner, about myself too, I was a child, I did not deserve that but how can I talk about it and heal and be more positive for my family and community. As above, self talk also includes imagination, can I see myself hurting another, as in the past, learning how self talk can help someone to not be violent and also another, to self talk about self esteem and heal from thinking unworthiness of being able to be safe and without violence on one's life.
8. **Self-care and prevention?** I'm feeling writer's block here, from what the manual suggests, so I have to rely on my own ideas: learning that self matters most, loving self and only then can other relationships be or become healthy. Following the medicine wheel, keeping balance and harmony in all of one's life. Home and work, walking the talk, healing, holism of self, emotional, mental, physical, spiritual. If one dimension seems out of focus, work as needed to bring that area back into balance with traditional holistic wellness and healing.
9. **Most violence** is from men because of the way colonization has belittled them and lied to them about how strong men oppress and own others, strong men do not cry or feel hurt or tell anyone of their own abuses and that women are to be owned like property and be there for sex, raising the family and being the target of men's anger. A difficulty lies in teaching men to be responsible for their own actions, to learn the what, why and how of their past and present and to move forward to healing with honesty and honor and

respect for women as cultural tradition once taught (by ancestors). Even if only 10% of women become violent, this is still a concern. Both genders, both statistics are alarming. Men and woman alike deserve to understand colonization and its negative, personal influences and to heal from it.

**10. Meeting check-outs** provide learning for both clients and facilitators. What did they learn, what stood out most or what practice can they go try and put to good use. But also, what might have triggered them, how are they going to take care of themselves when upset? Call a friend, go home to partner, hot bath, warm and comforting food, understanding, supportive and soothing friendships or call a counsellor? Facilitators watch for check out comments too, is intervention needed, what spoken stories at the end of group raise red flags, do facilitators need to contact someone, offer referrals, stay late to privately discuss such ideas with the client. Trust, honor and appreciate others' ideas and shared stories. Check-outs are also a deep breath, leaving spoken words of bad medicine (violence) behind in the room to dissolve, in order to discuss future steps towards healing (one baby step at a time).

The WAVS philosophy about learning from a perspective of where, how and why present-day physical and emotional aggressions stem is key to healthy, inter-related living. Elder Sara Modeste tells us, "They [Aboriginal peoples] don't know why, where they get this pain from. They get it from the residential school and literally from the Government of Canada" (Interview, [www.hiddenfromhistory.org](http://www.hiddenfromhistory.org)). Patrick, a participant, explains his emerging awareness of health perspectives from Warriors.

*I remember the first day that I got there, I felt at home right away because here they were talking in a circle and when it got to me I let out a little bit of tears. Stating, 'I'm a survivor of residential school and I have a lot of anger issues and I don't know how to have a relationship'. (February 1, 2011)*

Patrick demonstrates how vital a traditional sharing circle can be to acknowledgement of past and present systemic, institutional trauma. More participant experiences with residential schools are explored in chapters 4 and 5. As he and other participants indicate, the cultural familiarity of a sharing circle is a welcoming and safe place

for many members to begin their infinite processes of coping with and understanding, their relational past and adaptable present and future. Ultimately, awakening towards healing must be by choice, by learning active and viable non-violent behaviours. New ways of coping must be about courageously revisiting historical secrets of either victimization or perpetrator behaviours. David, a participant, explains:

*I didn't want to be responsible of my own behaviors. I always carried a secret. We talk about that in Warriors ... secrets, yeah. [Thinking that] Nobody's going to know about my secret ... about my anger, my abuse. How people treated me as a child and I always carried that. But I let it go, I worked on it and I released it. I wanted to be a different person. (December 7, 2010)*

I ask Melanie, a First Nations mother from Chehalis, BC,

*What is that like for you, when no one keeps secrets in your family?*

*It feels like I've got some kind of trust and connection and it's really important that when we talk about what we talk about, we smudge and we pray. We do things between us now and take care of our spiritual and – smudging. So that's what I do with my kids. (January 10, 2011)*

To contextualize Melanie's newer familial rituals, it is important to identify crucial aspects of familial violence in order to gain a better understanding of causes and solutions.

## **2.6 Western Knowledge And Health**

In order to fully understand the Indigenous paths I journey in my research with WAVS I must seek knowledge about Western health theory and health practices. Lori Alvord and Elizabeth Cohen Van Pelt (1999) invite us to further explore the commonsensical natures of our values, choices and actions. "We must treat our patients the same way we would treat our own relatives. We must find what has been lost as we have become so enraptured with scientific advancements: working with communities and creating bonds of trust and harmony" (p. 16). Many non-Indigenous peoples and institutions in Canada are conditioned by the Western paradigm to think a certain way about life and health, the

environment, education and Indigenous peoples. Unfortunately, such ways often fail to enhance bonds of trust and harmony. Berg, Evans, Fuller and The Okanagan Urban Aboriginal Health Research Collective (OUAHRC) (2007) highlight some of the bureaucratic structures and the interplay of racism, place and institutional ethics involved in establishing a research project with Aboriginal urban communities. The team investigates important issues of ethical policies of federal health grant-affording institutions such as the Social Science Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and how research funders seem to further marginalize urban Aboriginal peoples, along with influences of power relations about ethics in Aboriginal research, particularly within the wider spectrum of mainstream research applications.

Western health practices originated in Canada with settler Europeans, Fur Traders, Clergy and newly trained doctors and nurses. Over the years Aboriginal peoples began experiencing the euro-centric health practices negative impacts of poverty, crowded and inadequate housing, high rates of substance misuse, inefficient dietary needs and increased homicide and suicide rates (National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO), 2008). Such Western-driven impacts prove to be in opposition to Aboriginal peoples' traditional ways of healthy living. Presently, mainstream healthcare remains culturally insensitive and unsafe for many because many healthcare providers do not understand the vital health impacts that lack of Native healing practices present to many Aboriginal persons (Levin and Herbert, 2004; Polaschek, 1998). To name some of the health disparities between Euro-western and First Nations peoples, Aboriginal people die sooner than non-Aboriginals and have a greater burden of physical and intellectual disease (RCAP, 1996; Dion Stout et al., 2001). Heart disease is 1.5 times higher for Aboriginal peoples, while Type-2 diabetes remains three to five times higher (Health Canada, 2006). Health systems inclusive of their own philosophies and traditional practices are shaped by particular theoretical paradigms or worldviews such as the Medicine Wheel's interconnected realms of harmonious well-being. The dominant approach to health and healthcare in North America is known as biomedicine, formed from within a Western perspective and based heavily on Western science (Lester-Smith (Hill) and Fridkin, (m.s.) 2008). Upon a brief search and survey of lesser known Western models of health, my discovery has yielded literature titled "Biomedicine Examined (Lock, 1988); "Chinese medicinal materials and their interface with Western medical concepts" (Chan, 2005); "Asian versus western differences in satisfaction with western medical care: the mediational effects of illness attributions" (Armstrong, 1999); "Physicians of Western medicine: anthropological approaches to theory and practice" (Haun, 1985); "Unbearable

weight: Feminism, Western culture and the body” (Bordo, 2004); “The treatment of modern Western medical diseases with Chinese medicine: a textbook and clinical manual” (Flaws, 2002); and “Cultural context of medical practice” (Clark, 1983). Unfortunately, none of these publications offer insights as to the plurality of Western practiced biomedicine paradigms.

Biomedicine emphasizes a reductionist science whereby the body, mind and spirit are separate and distinct and the body is fragmented into smaller segments, each of which can be fixed when they are broken (Engebretson, 1994). The human body is viewed as a machine made up of different parts. Illnesses and health conditions are treated as the breaking down of separate biological entities and depending on which part ‘malfunctions’, a corresponding specialist doctor diagnoses and treats what needs ‘fixing’ based on their areas of training and expertise in one part of the body. For example, a patient may see a cardiologist to treat a heart condition and then separately see a dermatologist to treat a skin condition.

The process of distilling Indigenous and Western values does not free me from the tensions of such binaries. Similar to what Joe teaches, that we need both Western and Indigenous knowledge in order to compliment one another for the betterment of societal wellbeing, my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald and committee members Drs. Peter Cole, Hartej Gill and Carl Leggo, also caution against setting up adversarial binaries when constructing frameworks for research.

To do credit to the Western model of health, seeing a dermatologist might be much more helpful than seeing a general practitioner if in that particular condition the only part that needed treating were the skin. However, it would be more helpful to seek a healer with a more wholistic diagnosis if the problem itself were wholistic—if the skin rash were only the tip of the iceberg, one symptom of a large and serious health condition affecting many parts of the body. In this case, a surface treatment of the rash would not cure the disease. This disease can be compared with the trauma one carries along as a person with alcoholic parents; the rash can be compared to the outward manifestation of that trauma, which may be alcoholism. Regulating the alcoholism in the way instructed by a Western ‘12-step’ or similar program, which targets only the alcoholism is unlikely to offer a wholistic or effective means of healing. I learn from Donna, a Caucasian participant who has been together with Patrick, also a participant, for twelve years. As part of her individual and relational awareness, she tells me her comparative concerns about Aboriginal health challenges and healing resources:



*The AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] 12-step model works for some people, not for everybody. It's very clear in its focus of what it's trying to do, it wants to help people to quit using drugs or quit drinking alcohol and if you follow the 12 steps, you should be able to accomplish this. It's pretty formulaic. Whereas at Warriors it's not formulaic. (December 3, 2010)*

Far from AA conventions, David discusses how WAVS helps participants reveal their 'secrets' in order to unwind their destructive cycles, whereas conventional programs may not have the same cultural tools to encourage people to share and reflect on the real roots—historical, familial and social—of the problems they face as adults.

*Mainstream's different ... when we go to AA we just talk about ourselves; how we make that change from not taking that first drink or that first drug. But Warriors Against Violence, they gave me something I could take and hold to and when I feel uncomfortable I can take a 'time-out' or just look at it ... It's mostly about feeling. 'How come I'm feeling like this?' (December 8, 2010)*

Taking a 'time-out' when feeling angry and even more so when experiencing escalating anger, is a key part of the WAVS 'Control Plan' intervention strategy, to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

## **2.7 Healing Ways Of Being Among Urban Aboriginal Families**

As I move towards affirming the detrimental impacts that violence has on Aboriginal families and their communities (Brownridge, 2003; Campbell, 2002; Walker, Logan, Jordan and Campbell, 2004; Study Participants, 2012), I often feel cautious about re/presenting peoples' experiences through Western standards of statistical presentations and analysis. On the one hand, numerically measured statistics facilitate more understanding about a particular group of peoples in order to highlight awareness, immediacy and thus emancipation. On the other hand, announcing statistical data can enforce stereotypical judgment and subsequently deeper levels of marginalization on the basis of ethnicity, poverty, societal exclusion, disconnect and even dehumanization, as is often the case for many Aboriginal peoples (Lester-Smith (Hill) and Kurtz, 2008). Nevertheless, I feel compelled to re/present a brief numerical understanding here and in other relevant chapters

in order to broaden my/our inter-generational cognizance about urban Aboriginal peoples' health in the face of violence. The necessity for doing so can be elicited in Gail's intergenerational experience:

*Not only was the violence there for my Mom's generation but also my grandmother's generation. I mean, people said my grandmother was not normal but now I've heard some of the stories. My mother told me about how my grandmother—we had a staircase going up in the house and she'd put cornflakes on the stairwell, put cheesecloth over [the flakes] and then soaked it in kerosene. When my grandpa was going to come home she was going to torch it, so he'd be in the stairwell. But one of my uncles came to his senses—well, we'd all die [original voice emphasis] because we were upstairs and had no escape. It was then they decided she was crazy. But it was the violence. They always had guns and knives with them and one uncle stabbed another. (December 9, 2010)*

M. too, shares with me a similar experience, whereby intuitive logic falls astray during opportunistic moments of seeking immediate refuge from long-term suffering. Her nearly unimaginable story extracts from me only the barest of conversational acknowledgements.

*I'll tell you what was the straw that broke the camel's back in that relationship. I got to the point where I couldn't kill him, so I started thinking, 'Well, maybe I'll kill myself.' And I thought, 'I can't kill myself if I don't kill the girls because who will take care of them? Who will love them as much as I do?' I don't want them to be in foster care like I was because they didn't love me, they're not going to love her. No one loves them as much as I do. And if I kill myself, they'll be heartbroken, so I'm going to have to kill them, too. So I waited until they napped and uh, I had it all planned out.*

*While they had a nap, I repeat.*

*I had it all planned out. [Child's name] was going to go first because she was a light sleeper. So I couldn't very well kill my younger daughter first because the older daughter would wake up and I wouldn't be able to kill her if she was*

*awake. So I decided I was going to have to kill her first. And my younger daughter could sleep through a train going through the house and she wouldn't wake up. So I was going to kill her and then myself. So I went to my room, I was really tired because the whole plan made me exhausted, so I lay down for awhile and I must have fell asleep and I woke up and I thought, 'Ok, it's time to do it.' So I grabbed the gun and walked into their room and my older daughter was gone. Wrecked my plan. So I went to look, she usually naps for a very long time but that day she didn't, she woke up earlier than usual and she was out in the backyard, so I couldn't very well kill her in the backyard before I killed my younger one because it was just too awkward. So I changed my mind. I phoned my mother-in-law and I said, 'You'd better come over and get these girls, I just about killed them.' She made it to my place in half an hour and it was a three-quarter of an hour's drive. And, I went into – I must have went into shock because for two weeks I couldn't even get up. She left her son to look after me and he had to pour tea down my throat because I couldn't eat, I couldn't get up. I couldn't do anything. She kept my daughters for two weeks. So finally, after two weeks I thought, 'I can't lay here forever.' I thought, 'I need my daughters back.' So I got up, even though I was really, really weak and I hadn't eaten in all this time. He had to help me to the bathroom.*

*Yes?*

*I was so heartbroken. He had to help me with my pants down so I could pee, he's my brother-in-law but I didn't even care. I almost killed my girls. No, after that (inaudible) I could barely pick up the pen and I said, 'Could you get my checkbook for me? I want you to get my checkbook and go to the store and get me some –.' so I wrote him a list and I said, 'I'll give you this blank check, you go write a check for all this food.' It's all food – grocery because when you invite people over, you have to feed them.*

*Right.*

*So, I got up and I had some (inaudible) and I forced myself to get cleaned up and when he came back, I cooked. (Inaudible) and my brother-in-law brought the girls back. Oh, they were so happy to see me. That was medicine, to see those happy girls' faces.*

*Ah, 'good medicine'.*

*Yeah, and my mother-in-law was so happy that I was up again. She never said anything about what I almost did. She never judged me, she left my girls with me because she knew they'd be alright. She never even questioned me. And she didn't have to. I decided this is not doing me any good. So I left [my husband]. My spirit was broken. (March 3, 2011)*

Gail and M. both offer a glimpse into what ensuring tragedies are possible when familial matriarchs like our grandmothers [and/or community Elders] lose their bearings. Internal combustion of the self, the whole systems of self/ves and the family collapses. Inter-familial violence becomes norm regardless of ir/rationality. Stories of life, of pain and of resilience are shared and discussed among WAVS members, facilitators, study participants and me from which we connectively learn to shift from violence.

Violence against Aboriginal women “ranges widely, from 25% to 100%” depending on methodological factors (Brownridge, 2003, p. 66). Spousal homicide statistics show that Aboriginal women in Canada are eight times more likely than non-Aboriginal men to be killed by their partner (Trainor and Mihroean, 2001). The greater likelihood of spousal violence among Canadian Aboriginal peoples, as well as violence in general is also reflected in their disproportionate representation in Canada's correctional institutions (Weinrath, 2000). Although Aboriginal peoples represent 3% of the Canadian population, they make up 17% of federal inmates (Brownridge, 2003). In Brownridge's (2008) article, *Understanding the Elevated Risk of Partner Violence against Aboriginal Women*, participants reveal violence as their largest concern above other important health matters such as substance abuse, diabetes, Fatal Alcohol Syndrome, mental illness and historical traumas. WAVS and I collaboratively explore such necessities as the aforementioned health factors to counter the disparity between urban Aboriginal people's experiences of violence and the experiences of those who do not identify with family violence.

Melanie discusses ways of 'letting go' of her childhood traumas. About the benefits of WAVS in her life, she says her healing process has begun by *Just talking about every day things that go through our minds... things that hurt us. For myself, [healing is] being able to relieve myself of shortcomings and all these obstacles that help us learn about ourselves.* Her learnings have propelled her to recently celebrate her 2-year anniversary of sobriety (January 10, 2011). WAVS worldviews seem a cultural conduit as they allow for the passage of Indigenous epistemologies to members. To many Indigenous peoples, who for various reasons, have not been exposed to or partaken in Indigenous culture, traditional awareness can be a profound addition to their lives.

It is important to define not only cultural concepts but also those of violence so readers and I have the same foundational information from which to view this in-depth study. LaRocque (1994) defines violence as part of the process of colonization; "Aboriginal men have internalized White male devaluation of women" (p. 75). Patriarchal dominating behaviour has been shown to increase the likelihood of violence against women in Canada; therefore, "it is hypothesized that partners of Aboriginal women will engage in patriarchal domination and that patriarchal domination will be linked to an increased likelihood of violence" (p. 69). In my opinion, by focusing primarily on violence towards women LaRoque appears to overlook a greater reality: men *and* women can be both the perpetrators and/or the recipients of familial violence. To date, WAVS has served over 100 female perpetrators, about eight to 10 women a year (Joyce Fossella, Personal Communication, February 2, 2012). Stake (2004) persuades: "Generalization can be an unconscious process for both researcher and reader" (p. 44). Therefore, my/our project seeks a position along a continuum of generalizability—while the researcher, participants and readers cannot claim that all urban Aboriginal peoples are living within and/or healing from family violence experience. We can infer, however, that some of their living situations may be common. In work such as ours a certain degree of essentialism is beneficial. Learning about the unique, yet all too comparable stories expressed in this study can lead to a better understanding of the social conditions in which many Aboriginal peoples live and thus, to a decrease in violent attitudes and behaviours. Ultimately, healing must be by choice, by need and by learning active, viable non-violent behaviours. Joyce confirms,

*Years ago when we had a woman come in, she spoke and when she told her story [it turns out] she's a violent person. So at that point, the other facilitator, we kind of said, 'we need to talk'. Maybe for this person, this isn't the place*

*for them. We thought there was something going on in this person's life where she needed clinical help. And lots of times we're not able to provide that you know, that's part of [the healing] also.*

*She came back though and said, 'I'm ready to take the program now.' And she got her children back and had another child with her partner. And had a whole different look in her face, in her demeanor, in how she carried herself. It was so noticeable. Sometimes you're just not capable and you need to step back and receive other help first. But the seed was planted and you know, she came back. (December 15, 2011)*

As an observing participant at WAVS I once witness a similar situation, whereby a particular woman is often distraught with emotions about her familial past, her grown children and her young grandson presently living in foster care. To me she exemplifies a member who may not have been able to grasp and practice the WAVS intervention model. Some WAVS members are not simply challenged by choice but also by need. Although the process of healing requires not only a conviction of will, it too must include responsibility (response-ability)—the ability or inability, to respond to a given situation. More about situational-timing emerges when I meet with Terry. Our conversation about his dual roles in our community begins with my straightforward observation.

*I think one of the things that we both realize, Terry, is that you add an additional perspective. Not only are you from Warriors where we know each other, you're being taught their wisdom as a member and a new facilitator [after the death of Dan Parker, WAVS co-founder/facilitator] and then lo and behold you have a grandson sitting in your lap right now. Do you find that fascinating?*

*I do find that fascinating. I mean since I started Warriors last year in January, my first meeting, I didn't know what a healing circle was or what kind of traditional customs they used with it. Being able to practice [tradition], for example, even though I have a First Nations background, I didn't know what smudging was until I started the circle. (March 16, 2011)*

Terry is now in his second year of an Aboriginal Family Counseling program. Part of his understanding about healing involves learning some differences between mainstream counselling services and WAVS. I ask him to help me understand a wider perspective.

*Before you contacted Warriors did you approach other community agencies?*

*I did contact counseling to seek counseling for one-on-one with myself. I did attend as a couple with my fiancé and led into doing some one-on-one with myself to find out where the anger stemmed from. Truthfully counseling did help at one point but then I felt it wasn't strong enough to identify the root of the problem what I was seeking and truthfully I led the counselor to believe this and this and this and just gave them what they wanted to hear in a sense. (March 16, 2011)*

Traditional counseling does not resolve deep-seated issues for some. Wholistic healing is difficult. Not to mention, participants in traditional settings might speak dishonestly in order to satisfy what the typical counselor may want to hear. Terry articulates how Western intervention programs *tend to deal more with surface issues and how to control [anger] and some tools like write down what I'm feeling now to keep a log of it. But it wasn't helping me to find out where it was coming from and why I was behaving like this.*

Writing about Terry in this moment reminds me of my own traditional practices (or lack thereof) at times. I remember one day, here on the UBC campus.

*When walking to class, I pull a sprig of cedar foliage from a large tree. Alas, it does not come off easily and as I struggle to peel its bow, I find myself saying aloud, 'Ouch, that's gotta hurt! I am so sorry for not asking you permission first. Thank you so much.' I've forgotten my protocols of respect for nature. As for my need to carry a cedar sprig for the day, when I return home my husband asks about it. 'I just need a little extra strength close to me today' I answer. (Personal Field Note, June 7, 2011)*

Holmes (2000) warns that we can borrow things from the land but should do not take anything from it without asking first. She discusses a "fixed and timeless genealogical link between land and humans ... In this heart knowledge, blood memory and the voice of the

land constitute an *ancestry of experience* that shapes dreams, desires, intentions and purposeful activity” (p. 46). While my values and actions towards the cedar spray are, for all intent and purposes backwards, my heart knowledge remained steadfast towards my spoken protocols. My need of cedar-strength at times is an innate logical perception. Although seemingly insignificant in terms of violence, it helps me to understand more illogical and complex points of view such as this one: My Cowichan Indian Tribes Elder, Sarah Modeste, explains her perceptions as a result of the violence she endured throughout her life. “If I didn’t have my training that my Elders gave me I wouldn’t be living... It’s really horrible to be, to be a woman. You’re a nurturer of life, you’re a nurturer for your family—and then someone does that to you” (Interview, [www.hiddenfromhistory.org](http://www.hiddenfromhistory.org)). On the other hand, Sarah has implored me to not forget our men. They, too, have experienced violence as a result of Western unhealthy influences (Personal Field Note, 2006).

Over 50% of Aboriginal populations live in urban centers and two thirds of these urban populations are in Western Canada. An estimated 28,000 Aboriginal peoples reside in Vancouver and its suburban environs and 70% of Vancouver’s total Aboriginal population lives in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. Three-quarters of the residents live at the edges of poverty and experience higher risks of family violence (Benoit et al., 2003; Didluck and Piombini, 2001; Vedan, 2002). As the First Minister’s Report (2005) discusses, Aboriginal funding has not kept pace with the growing urban population and therefore, has failed to meet many urban living Aboriginal peoples’ socio-personal/political hardships of education, poverty, shelter and overall health, rooted in cultural disconnect and pervasive, ongoing colonial oppression and discrimination. Madeleine Dion Stout, through her participation in the film, “Where Are our Children? Healing the Legacy of the residential schools” offers a greater understanding of what poverty can mean to so many First Nations peoples. As a retired nurse, scholar and educator, Dion Stout imparts her experiential-based wisdom that we need to be cautious when describing poverty. Poverty is inclusive of so much more than a lack of money, food, clothing and shelter. She reminds us that for many Indigenous peoples poverty includes loss of culture, familial love, traditions, languages, safety, identity, belonging, generational relationships (i.e. cultural teachings passed on) and spiritual connectedness with nature (Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the legacy of Hope Foundation, 2012). WAVS, throughout its intervention and Dion Stout, with her experiential-based wisdom, effectively contribute to the multiple levels of traditional healing with their purposeful teachings and tools offered to diminish some of the health inequities between



Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples reported by the First Ministers (2005) and the Royal Commissions on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) (1996).

One WAVS member speaks of the agency's value in his personal, familial and community life: 'Change is vital. It is life-saving' (Group Meeting Field Note, March 30, 2010). For numerous members who likewise believe the WAVS program to be life saving, the model facilitates greater awareness of the root causes of violence within families. It rests on the cornerstone that traditional healing practices are paramount to a strong sense of good health. A number of participants share about their healing crossroads: some identify how they came to attend Warriors, others reiterate differences between the WAVS model and those within Western practices; Freda conveys her initial familial intentions for attending Warriors.

*The reason that I came to Warriors Against Violence, essentially, was to learn and to be involved and myself and my daughter. She was being really abusive to me and I couldn't handle it – I had high blood pressure, I was stressed out, and uh, no matter what I did I felt like I couldn't do anything for my child to change and now she's an adult, my daughter. No matter if I was being good to my daughter or not being good or trying to ignore her, she would push me physically, psychologically, verbally, again, to the point where I just didn't know whether I was going to hang in there or not. (December 6, 2010)*

According to *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, of the nearly 7,900 senior victims of violent crime in 2009 over 2,400 or (35%) were committed by a member of the victim's family (2009, p. 6). As painful and as unacknowledged as this form of vertical violence (from child to parent) is, it is one that seems unexplored by other participants. Freda's courage to awaken and move towards healthier relationships with herself and others is a testament to all WAVS members who wholly support one another along their parallel healing journeys.

Many Aboriginal peoples believe, learn and re-member through 'blood memory' that First Nations peoples are all spiritually connected in health dis-ease and in health wellness. Such practices may include a belief in the Medicine Wheel (spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual aspects of our well-being); sacred ceremonies (sweat lodges, burning and smudging and ceremonial brushings); sacred healing herbs (sweetgrass, sage, cedar, tobacco and juniper); Aboriginal-led counselling; and traditional healers (Chee Mamuk

Aboriginal Program: STI/HIV Prevention and Control, 2010; WAVS, 2003). WAVS confirms that Medicine Wheel teachings are important methods for “looking after ourselves in a well-balanced way and [that] the rewards can be achieved by doing this (i.e. compassion, respect, acceptance, pride, strength, kindness, firmness, etc.)” (WAVS Manual, 2003, p. 51).

## 2.8 Participatory Healing At WAVS

The foundation upon which the WAVS violence intervention model rests is comprised of relational healing cornerstones that members are taught and encouraged to further explore (Guidance Committee Field Note, October 2, 2009). These cornerstones are designed for the best possible understanding about from where contemporary violence among Aboriginal peoples predominantly originates. The factors are not exclusive of one another, nor are they exclusive to the organization’s theory, methodology and socio-educational healing practices. They are relationally entwined. In other words, the ways in which many contemporary Aboriginal peoples heal is by leaning on the strength of our Ancestors/present-day traditional teaching and future implications. As Freda explains,

*Sharing information, negative or positive, does help people, whether we know it or not. It’s just a process – someone can grasp something – something good or something bad – that triggers them, another way to handle things or know that they’re not the only one going through whatever they’re going through. (December 6, 2010)*

WAVS teachings are about assisting members through storytelling to learn and to understand the following about themselves, their families and their community surroundings about the anger they feel and resulting negative behaviors. The WAVS model of intervention teaches five most influential factors from where anger and often-ensuing abuse might originally stem. Here, David refers to them:

*I remember the anger wheel at Warriors and we were talking about original family and society and stress and what about culture and you know, what about not knowing your own people. So that worked for you, as in, it helped you?*

*It helped me to work out how I was feeling and why I was feeling like that. And that humans, we all make mistakes and mistakes are good too because you learn from them and do something better instead of being arrogant and start swearing, you know. Both men reinforce notions of tradition, trust, mistakes, forgiveness and ultimately, ways of respect for all humanity.*  
(February 8, 2011)

Aspects of the 'anger wheel' and its descriptions are shown in Figure 2.1 on the next page. Throughout Warriors' program each of these abuse cornerstones is discussed in detail within the respective group sessions.

**Figure 2.1:** Relational Reasons for Abuse



1. **Family of Origin:** Family and/or residential schooling; foster care (being a part of the federal and provincial Ministries of children and families 60s scoop); and looking to the past to understanding how one was/is victimized.
2. **Stress:** Present-day and buried emotional pain and everyday stress at home, work or other community settings that keeps people stuck in the realm of anger.
3. **Social /Cultural:** 'Passing': the loss of culture and tradition, as demonstrated by members' experiences of discrimination, spiritual abuse and learned behaviors (Goffman, 1963); concepts of ownership (i.e. 'I can do what I want with them'—abuse of wife, partner, family) and lastly, negative messages and behaviors that are still being passed on to next generations (i.e. 'after seven generations of sleep'. Aboriginal Elders are now 'waking up' and becoming more aware of their past traumas, learned behaviors and societal influences like racism, sports, music, movies, media and the ways contemporary society implicitly advocates violence and has become desensitized to the violence and the peoples affected by it).
4. **Unknown Factors:** Negative legacies such as witnessing abuse; war; residential school (of self and/or family members); history; past traumas; and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
5. **Feelings:** Checking-in with revisiting self; acknowledging feelings; being conditioned to shut out feelings and emotions; the past; how members feel about being abused; and an opportunity to reconnect with self.

The primary method by which members teach and learn from one another is through the Indigenous tradition of storytelling within 'talking circles' (France and McCormick, 1997; Graveline, 2000, 2002; Lester-Smith and Price, 2010; WAVS Manual, 2003). Archibald (1997) explains how one's belonging in a circle influences both the wholism of the community and that of the individual:

An Indigenous philosophical concept of wholism refers to the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual (metaphysical

values and beliefs in the Creator), emotional and physical (body and behavior/action) realms to form a whole healthy person. The development of holism extends to and is mutually influenced by one's family, community, band and nation. The image of a circle is used by many First Nations peoples to symbolize wholeness, completeness and ultimately wellness. The never-ending circle also forms concentric circles to show both the synergistic influence of and our responsibility toward the generations of ancestors, the generations of today and the generations yet to come. The animal/human kingdoms, the elements of nature/land and the Spirit World are an integral part of the concentric circles. (p. 22)

WAVS echoes Archibald's values about wholeness, completeness and ultimately wellness within its intervention model of healing from and ending family violence. They model offer members a focus on sharing/learning traditions at their group-meeting circles. The agency introduces a number of 'best practices' like taking personal ownership of the violence that each offender does to another person; building on personal strengths; pragmatically sharing his/her comprehensive familial experiences and cultural teachings; and engaging members' voices by demonstrating genuine trust, confidentiality, listening, understanding and storytelling. In my participation at WAVS (2009 to present), I have not witnessed a single new group member to whom facilitators did not compliment for the newcomer's courage and strength it takes to 'walk through that door'. Joe readily admits to all that he was in that exact same position fourteen years ago when he first walked through the doors of Change of Seasons (the parent agency from which WAVS began in 1998). Presently, he now teaches new, sometimes-scared members plausible reasons that help to identify the systemic root causes of their sometimes-volatile anger.

Over our coffee visit I ask White Owl,

*When we share about our family of origin and with the sacred feather going around, what was that like for you?*

*It was great. Evenings like that need to happen more often because we need to take care of stuff and talk about it. That's the only way we can deal with stuff is to talk about it. You know how they say time heals all wounds? But not*

*really. It's honesty—when you talk about stuff in an honest way that's what's healing.* (December 9, 2010)

In a 2005 study by Dodson and Struthers that focuses on health and wellness, Aboriginal participants identify their view of health as related to the Indigenous principle of wholism.

They viewed health as the relationships among self, others and the environment', believing that 'balance between spirit-mind-body [-emotion] is necessary' and in particular, that 'spirituality was viewed as a central element and when the person was balanced and whole, the physical was health (p. 341).

As a spiritual paradigm central to WAVS' family violence intervention model, this spiritual mirror offers many a timeless connectedness with our collective past/present/futures. The Medicine Wheel is a mirror through which I come to a deeper understanding about who I am; where my wholeness as a being has been sometimes strengthened, sometimes compromised; and in any less-balanced health awareness, what complex experiences and perceptions I might face in the future. The five Medicine Wheel dimensions through which I/We views health are: Self, East, South, West and North. I use these cardinal directions merely as subheading labels. Based on personal preference, they could easily be reassigned as centre, hot, tepid cold and cool or as unity, soul, senses, body and head.

### **2.8.1 Self as our Sacred Centre**

*The self is singular, the self is plural, the self is renewed in every breath we take; it has remained a constant guide since the beginning of time. The self is awake, aware and a dynamic ancestral Sage every second of every 1440 minute/24 hour/ 365 ¼ day-year of our Mother Earth-lives.* (Personal Field Note, January 19, 2010)

As I was falling asleep last night, I decided today would be the day I would stop, listen, consider and define my/our 'self'. Within the individual and plural complexities of my animate self-awareness, learning from sleep is not an unusual task for me and for many

Aboriginal peoples. We can learn from my/our Sages during twilight and deep sleeps (Castellano, 2000; Graveline, 2002; Lane et al., 2004; Marsden, 2004; Turton, 1997; Wilson, 2008), as I do, referenced in my story below.

*Throughout my undergraduate education, I would often study day and night—by daylight my class notes remained tangible, in hand as I read through them over and over again; by dream-guidance, my mind would revisit, reread and continue to visualize my typed notes. Word by word, page by page, I read them during my sleep. For each exam, I could easily read the professor's typed questions on the paper before me and find the answers in my mind. I would flip to the very page of that particular topic/answer and then scribe my sleep-studied notes. (Personal Field Note, March 2010).*

From a Western perspective of learning, was I 'cheating'? After all, I was 'reading' from *somewhere* and then 'copying' answers. However, from an Indigenous perspective I still continue to connect with those spirits who guide me to think, to articulate and to write from and about the knowledges and our shared 'good medicine' deep within me. I use the terms 'good medicine' and 'bad medicine' experientially, spiritually and metaphorically as Joe often explains to WAVS members: *If you can't feel it here (gesturing to his head) and here (to his heart), then it is not a good-medicine place to be.* Cajeté (1997) supports that "self-actualizing [our]selves, fulfilling [our] human potentials, enlivening [our] creative spirit and finding their personal meaning, power is what in earlier times Indian people called medicine" (p. 190).

Joe teaches WAVS members, *We are not here to fix your relationships—the first healthy relationship is with yourself* (Group Meeting Field Note, March 30, 2010). The self, in its search for healthy 'good medicine' about which Cajeté and Joe speak, is and is not, me/you/us/them. It is a collective, the inherent heritage, the ancestral knowledge gifted to us through oral storytelling, books, dreams, Elders, professors, colleagues and quiet reflections and the theoretical focal point of our health and well-being (Archibald, 2008; Young and Nadeau, 2005). The process of "recovering this sacred vitality involves reversing the levels of disassociation and disconnection in the body caused by daily racial, sexual and colonial violence" (Young and Nadeau, 2005, p. 11).



### **2.8.2 The East Dimension**

Everything begins in the East—we awake with a renewed sense of aliveness each day and we go to sleep at dusk with a sense of anticipation for this foundational direction to return to us at dawn. It is the direction of beginnings and cyclical returns. The East represents guidance and leadership and abilities such as seeing clearly through complex situations with clear speech, self-reliance, trust in one's self, believing the interconnectedness of all things and learning to use power (positive control of our lives) efficiently (Lane et al., 2004). "Power" refers to the transformative capacity of human action (Kondrat, 2002, p. 438).

### **2.8.3 The South Dimension**

The South is the place to prepare for the future, the place of the heart, generosity, sensitivity to others, loyalty, compassion and love. It is also a place of discipline, determination, strength and fiery passion, key factors to assist us to achieve life-goals. With our spiritual insights we can better understand our purposes in life and our ancestral connectedness to one another, our knowledge, our health and our healing (Lane et al., 2004). It is with this south-guidance of determination and strength that many WAVS members and I continue to live throughout our lives.

### **2.8.4 The West Dimension**

The West is where we become fully attentive to the moment. Our realizations, our awareness is paramount in order to continue along the circular journey of the Medicine Wheel and of our healing processes. In her book, *Daughters are Forever* (2002), Lee Maracle describes the West wind as a personified metaphor of active inspiration:

He is a moment of awesome aliveness. He inspires oneness. His presence tugged at her every cell, lined them up, opened her musculature. Light shot between each cell, blood rushed in, cleaned up old, toxic places and restored breath inside every part of her being. (p. 211)

The awareness and rejuvenation experienced in the West awakens and inspires us to continue along our journeys no matter the obstacles we face. It is an integral dimension of both the Medicine Wheel and my/our thesis framework.

### **2.8.5 The North Dimension**

Situation-solving movement and justice live in the Northern sphere of the Medicine Wheel and while traveling towards it, we gain a great vision about the dawning place of true wisdom. Understanding my/our past/present relations and crucial awareness is paramount to our life-journeys. The North does not represent a destination of personal wellness because the Medicine Wheel is never static—like Indigenous knowledges, it is dynamic and ever-evolving. The North facilitates our learning processes and then encourages a space within where differences can be understood and difficulties can be transformed for the betterment of all Indigenous peoples. For many, the Medicine Wheel's symbolic journey and its assistance with health and 'good medicine' is ageless.

## **2.9 Closing Discussion**

In this chapter, I explore Indigenous knowledges alongside the Medicine Wheel in re/developing (or conceptualizing) a theoretical framework for dealing with family violence that fits the very fluidness of our health.

Theory enables us to deal with contradictions and uncertainties. Perhaps more significantly, it gives us space to plan, to strategize, to take greater control over our resistances. The language of a theory can also be used as a way of organizing and determining action. It helps us to interpret what is being told to us and to predict the consequences of what is being promised ... If it is a good theory it also allows for new ideas and ways of looking at things to be incorporated constantly without the need to search constantly for new theories. (Smith, 1999, p. 38)

Including the language of IK theory and practice in health programs and practices that aim to address the needs of Aboriginal peoples is critical in order to reduce barriers to Aboriginal

peoples accessing health services; resist or provide an alternative to a dominant, oppressive and colonial health system; and promote the inclusion of a diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their choices for traditional healing worldviews and medicinal knowledges.

Theory allows us to borrow ideas from other topics and apply them to our own fields of interest/concerns. Interfacing Indigenous/biomedical health models enables new frameworks for working within a variety of health systems and effectively meeting the needs of diverse peoples. This combined approach or interfaced medicine refers to a system of medicine that integrates biomedicine with alternative health knowledge systems (Baer, 2002). It combines different concepts, practices and values from different health models, including complementary and alternative medicine and conventional medicines. Cultural-interfaced approaches to health programs are successful in international Indigenous contexts (Boyer, 2006; Dodson and Struthers, 2005; Durie, 2004; France and McCormick, 1997; Morgan and Slade, 1997; NAHO, 2008; WAVS, 2003). Although, rather than 'different concepts', perhaps the term 'diverse concepts' may be a more appropriate description of alternative medicinal ways. Even so, 'unconventional' may be the aptly word for 'alternative'. As my tension of word and meaning choice demonstrates, so too, do lexical labels and processes of infusing biomedicine with alternative health knowledge systems flex and wan. When naming different approaches, how does one avoid adversary—at the very least, binary—points of view and practice? Does not both mainstream and alternative medicinal theories and methods 'other' one another when presenting polar tensions of our ways and their ways? On a grander scale I ruminate that this very dissertation signifies a collection of multiple ideals, thoughts and practices of alternative *other-hood*.

Re/gaining cultural knowledge about 'other' unknowns such as our familial origins like my intergenerational-grounding recipes mentioned earlier, traditional knowledges and practices of good health can be a protective factor against family violence. This knowing becomes beneficial to WAVS members, both offenders and recipients of violence. This knowing becomes beneficial to WAVS members, both offenders and recipients of violence. As David confirms from his perspective,

*[A friend] talked real good about Warriors. He said that's where I need to belong. He said, 'Just keep going. Commit yourself. As long as you're there, you're going to learn. But if you just talk about it, you're not going to learn.'*  
(December 7, 2010)

David helps me to identify that Warriors instills praxis (theories of learning transformed into action) in order for First Nations peoples to heal. He also leaves me to consider my theoretical reflections, that within the inner wisdom of individuality, of blood memory and of ancestral connected-ness I can resolve,

*Theories fit not only the historical times in which they were created but also the contemporary times in which they are re/considered to best understand my/our lives. And yet—I and we are a living, indefinable theoretical framework.* (Personal Field Note, January 9, 2010)

In this theoretical chapter, I survey and articulate my understandings about wholistic well-being from scholars, community members, Coyote and my/our intuitive-ancestral knowledges. In the following chapter I more thoroughly delve into the Medicine Wheel's symbolic/spiritual teachings of harmonious wellness.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

*I am leaving UBC campus via one of our housing roads and notice a car has accidentally hit a squirrel. Although the squirrel is in the middle of the road, its body does not otherwise seem overly injured. I park my car and search around me for protection but all I have are few Starbucks napkins. I reach for a labeled, colonized, corporatized napkin but then think, 'That doesn't work for me; it's not going to honour the squirrel.' So I get out of the car, walk back, gingerly pick up the squirrel so that it rests in my two upturned palms and carry it off to a sidewalk path, already eyeing a nearby cedar tree under shade. I lie the squirrel at the base of the tree and then return my car saying a blessing for myself too because I know there can potentially be germs on my hands and at the moment have no way to clean them. I say a prayer not only for the squirrel but also that I wouldn't pass anything that would make anybody else or myself ill. (Personal Field Note, July 13, 2009)*

### 3.1 Context

The days of researchers using knowledge gained from Aboriginal communities for their own benefit, such as individual career enhancement and prestige are coming to an end. (Baskin, 2005, p. 172)

Indigenous methodology (IM), although deeply personal and pragmatic in its own diversity among Aboriginal peoples, is about intuitively knowing how, why and where the agency of transformation is necessary. This journey begins when we consciously make room in our wholistic being for the gentle drumming of our pulse, our ancestral heart knowledge. IM is not only knowing exactly what we must do but also admitting that we sometimes traverse like Coyote with, at first glance, seemingly uncertainty along the way and like Squirrel needing a respectful burial ground—we occasionally lose our concentration. We then waver, question and experiment until we find the best-suited ideas and practices with which and whom we require at that particular time. Within a transformative IM framework, we can find new and culturally-appropriate processes as part of the journey. I understand that our methodological practices are personal, sensitive and heartfelt to our very core of who we are as Indigenous peoples. They are authentic,

valid/vital, necessary and commonsensical (Cole, 2006; Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson and Sookraj, 2009; Lester-Smith, 2008; WAVS Manual, 2003).

From within an Indigenous/Western lens, James Youngblood Henderson suggests that “[e]urocentric thought claims to be universal and general...the dominated always appeared to be afflicted with some defect or intrinsic failing” (p. 63). Yet Joe speaks about the effective fusion of two worldviews that many Aboriginal leaders also value (Archibald, 2008; Cole, 2004; Haig-Brown, 2009; Young, 2006a). In an Aboriginal leadership pamphlet by Young (2006), Chief Leonard George affirms “Our individual responsibility is to become the best human beings possible and to enhance that stability in others. Through this kind of development true healthy leadership is possible.”

As I see how WAVS’ leadership, purpose and traditional/contemporary techniques facilitate learning a new way towards healthy families I am confronted with the duality of meanings encoded in the word ‘warrior’. For instance while Melanie, a participant defines her warrior role as *having the courage to change her life for the better* (January 10, 2011), another WAVS member interprets his experiences of not fitting in with his family or home community as the cause of his degenerating into a warrior (a fighting warrior in the negative sense of the word). He feels misguided by family and community implicit messages and that since there was no family cohesiveness and positive role models for him as a young man—*he must become a warrior then one who does some bad things* (Group Meeting Field Note, March 4, 2010). The essence demonstrates that across cultures and ethnicities people must arrive at a clear knowing of their intimate culture and peoples of origin (Grand, 2004; Parent, 2009). To deny our strong connectedness within humanity, to not know our individual and collective identity, re/presents a potential failure in any forward moving recovery processes.

My Aboriginal heritage plays a big part in this research, as traditionally research relations are often organized by non-Aboriginal scholars presumed to be the holders of knowledge and focus on those presumed to *need* the research (Cole and O’Riley, 2005). In the case of Aboriginal peoples they were—and too often still are—the subjects or the object of study and primarily. Research was done *about* them, *on* them and not often enough *for* them. However, increasing numbers of community members and researchers are coming to understand this paradigm shift: that Participatory Action Research (PAR), about Aboriginal peoples in particular, needs to be not only *about* the people but *for* the people and *by* the people.

## 3.2 Indigenous Methodological Perspectives

Beyond WAVS healing methods, timeless Ancient/contemporary understandings about finding one's true familial connections can be found embedded in this vivid Zen metaphor: "The monkey is reaching for the moon in the water, until death overtakes him he will never give up. If he would only let go of the branch and disappear into the deep pool, the whole world would shine with dazzling clearness" (Lee, 2000, p. 29). As the always reaching yet ever-hesitant monkey demonstrates paths to trustful learning and thriving with authenticity is not always an easy process; however, it is one I believe in. My dissertation process has been one of synthesizing past, present and future knowledge through a comprehensive approach to understanding the following socio-personal/interrelated methods.

- Multi-sensorial witnessing, experiencing, learning and practices
- Community/academic collaborations
- WAVS oral history and written archival materials such as group observations and anonymously written program evaluation forms
- Conversations with WAVS co-founders/co-facilitators and members attending WAVS and community
- Elders (their intergenerational Indigenous Knowledges)
- Aboriginal storytelling
- Traditional teachings
- Animals
- Dreams<sup>6</sup>
- Heritage and Kinetic Memory
- Song and dance
- Cultural components

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<sup>6</sup> In this particular dream (2010), three years after my mom's passing, I see my mom with her back to me, facing the window at the foot of our bed, in our bedroom. She opens the curtains with a gesture of spreading her arms wide and distinctly calls my name, 'Mish' (short for my middle name, Michele). I instantly awake and look at my clock. It is exactly 7:00 am. Although I usually wake up at 8:00 am because I see my mom and hear her with such clarity, I instinctively know that this morning, waking 7:00, is a pre-determined plan of the day for me.

- Writing
- Emerging new issues

With the assistance of such multiple learning tools our collaborative project about the WAVS traditional intervention model is anticipated to become an insightful contribution to many Aboriginal communities struggling with violence and to the field of health and wellness. The kind of collaborative research within which WAVS members, participants and I engage during this project, I refer to as Indigenous Collaborative Research (ICR). I preface that my considerations about ICR and its learning tools remain personal and analytical interpretations. In other words, they are not objective. They cannot be. It is only through my and participants' subjective thoughts and experiences through which I/We view the world that I can speculatively speak and write about my understandings. However, despite their subjectivity, I feel along with Creswell (1998) that such case studies are sufficient for valid qualitative research. He states, "What motivates the researcher ... is the idea of *generalizability* [italics in original]" (p. 63). Stake (2004) describes qualitative research involving case studies such as these as *instrumental* if a particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization. "The case is of secondary interest; it plays a supporting role and it facilitates our understanding of something else... A researcher may jointly study a number of instrumental cases in order to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition" (p. 437).

In this study, each and every participant may be considered instrumental in their personhood and in their contributions of understanding. Individually and collectively embedded in both my learnings and teachings about dynamic notions of respectful relationships with all who/that exist in our world today, I explore the following:

1. How Indigenous Collaborative Research (ICR) as an evolving, adaptable extension of Participatory Action Research (PAR) might benefit WAVS. More specifically, how this interfaced way of learning, teaching and knowing actively supports members seeking to heal from the intergenerational wounds of systemic violence (section 3.2);
2. What Indigenous Methodologies, particularly storytelling can look like in terms of a visual balanced health and framework (section 3.3); and



3. How Indigenous storytelling is being used through traditional and contemporary ways of healing (section 3.4).

It is not so much that the WAVS members in this study participation can be deemed of participatory action or not or Indigenously collaborative or not but before moving on to describe my/our study methodology, I must be clear in my understanding of PAR in order to strengthen my resolve about ICR.

### **3.2.1 Participatory Action Research**

Hall (1982) uses the term 'participatory research' to capture the essence of the combination of social inquiry and community participation in decision making that research approaches in these parts of the world had in common (p. 21). Participatory action research is often described as a process that integrates education, research and action (Hall, 1993, p. xiv; Selener, 1997, p.12). Critical thinking skills are developed through participation in dialogue, where dialogue takes place between marginalized or oppressed society members and the dominant society members. Key to effective PAR is that oppressors "must realize that their own conviction of the necessity for struggle (an indispensable dimension of revolutionary wisdom) was not given to them by anyone else...it is reached by means of a totality of reflection and action" (Freire, 1970, p. 67). The oppressed also must commit themselves to the struggle and "must reach this conviction as subjects, not as objects" (Freire, p. 67).

PAR involves frameworks and practices that compliment Indigenous peoples, knowledges and methodologies. Its principles promote a commitment to social justice, while challenging relations of power by decentering researchers with Western 'expertise' assumptions and centering the very people for whom the project is necessary. In other words, according to Evans et al., (2009), PAR is designed to

challenge the historical privileging of Western positivist science that emphasize(d) neutrality and objectivity (p. 5), [whereby] the gaze of the research emanates from the standpoint of 'the people' and the object of the gaze informing the research and action are the experiences of oppression and marginalization. (p. 10)

The ultimate goal of PAR is to “link the processes of research, by which data are systematically collected and analyzed, with the purpose of taking action or affecting social change” (Green, George, Daniel, Frankish, Herbert, Bowie, and O'Neil, 1997, p. 53).

### **3.2.2 Indigenous Collaborative Research**

As I begin to explore my own Aboriginal community relationships and our collaborative research relations, my developing ICR practices inclusive of both Indigenous knowledges and methodologies are not necessarily better but nevertheless have evolved differently than some standard PAR practices. In this project, participants are often the researchers. They want to explore insights about WAVS. They are eager to share personal experiences to support the continuation of WAVS and vital reasons for other communities to adopt the program based on their now-documented successful healing within it. They also seek answers, delve into discussions and offer sound recommendations.

Meanwhile, at times I respectfully don the role of a participatory learner. As researcher, I take on a ‘back-seated’ role of working with WAVS within this newly defined ICR paradigm. Paradoxically, I work behind the scenes to assist the agency while taking full driver-responsibility over the completion of my study. Some of these activities include contributing to meals served before each meeting; updating agency pamphlets; assisting with proposal writing; sharing relevant literature; assisting with fundraising events; having coffee or lunch with Joyce every few weeks to support one another; attending board and *ad hoc* program meetings when asked; and lastly, sending monthly updates about my work to WAVS board members and my Aboriginal Community Guidance Committee members to whom I remain accountable. In September 2009 I created a Guidance Committee for this project by inviting community leaders to assist me in considering questions about theory, methodology, practices and outcomes for our study with WAVS. Of possible interest is that I did so without my university supervisory committee’s prior knowledge. Three months later, during my first academic committee meeting Dr. Peter Cole asks me, ‘Who told you to do this?’ to which I answer, *No one. But as Dr. Archibald led me towards planning our UBC supervisory committee meeting together, I instinctively knew that I could not attend without first having sought learning from my community Knowledge-Keepers.*

The following two graphics depict my learned articulations about PAR/ICR conceptual and contextual models.

**Figure 3.1: PAR/ICR Conceptual Model**



**Figure 3.2: ICR Contextual Model**



In my efforts to concentrate on an ICR-based project with those who hold the wisdom (WAVS and related community leaders) I have discovered the commonality and frequency of two guiding principles. These are *Relationality* and *Adaptability*: What perceived relations led to my deciding to ceremoniously place the killed squirrel under a nearby cedar tree, and what adaptations, perhaps re/emerging traditional ones in the past/present, caused me to use my own hands instead of the Starbucks napkin? Considering 1) What *relations* (with family, community, heritage, etc.) might have led participants to WAVS, and 2) What *adaptations* in connection to re/emerging traditional ones, may have helped them and their families towards a healthier future.

### **Relationality**

Building relationships by visiting, sharing, friendships and extending kinship, increases potential for new ways to emerge: new ideas, new technologies and an expanded web of relational accountability. (Cohen, 2010, p. 146)

In highlighting this way of being in harmony with all life around us, Cohen challenges us to tap into our ancestral/spiritual knowledges. I interpret my own instinctive non-mysterious relationality as characterized by my/our relationships in our world today. Indeed, I trust my intuition, my/our Creator's guiding voice. Heard in my right-brain hemispherical realm and not shadowed by my analytical, judgmental left-brain reasoning, I feel a safer, more peaceful and authentic woman. First Nations peoples since time immemorial, too, have believed in this intuition. Contemporary scholars such as Archibald (2008), Atleo (2004), Brown (2004), Dei (2000), Vedan (2002) and Wilson (2008) explore relationality within the spheres of people, nature, animals, spirituality, symbolic healing, research and ethics. Many support these animate cultural symbols and healing processes in terms of reverent storytelling and community/collective endeavors of Aboriginal worldviews and methodological practices (Archibald, 2008; France and McCormick, 1997; King, 2007; Marsden, 2004; McCaleb, 2003). Shawn Wilson, in his 2008 book, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, makes clear that Indigenous methodologies *are* relational. From an Indigenous perspective, our world is animate and the relations we hold with all are vital to Aboriginal ways of knowing and being. Leslie, a co-facilitator, sees relationality amongst all life forms and his place in it to care and to nurture:

*I'm concerned about the wellness of an infant and I'm also concerned about the wellness of this planet that we live on. And I'm concerned in between that. When I see things that happened, like the oil spill on the Gulf of Mexico and I see things like oil-covered wildlife—that does something to my Spirit. That saddens me right to the core and there's no other way to—those types of events make me feel helpless (said passionately). But when I'm able to pick up someone's child, and I'm able to nurture them in some way, even just by having the child laugh and giggle with me, that makes a big difference because now I'm having a direct impact on the wellness of an individual.*  
(December 1, 2010)

Relationships about which Leslie speaks to suggest that spiritual, physical, emotional and/or intellectual disturbances in our world can cause imbalances within ourselves. His poignant movement between elemental disaster and humanity reminds me of the following ethical passage:

The elements of earth, water, fire, air and [inner-self] space are never exhausted but always present. The bodhisattva says, 'In the same way sentient beings depend on the elements for their life, so may I always sustain them'. (Farber and His Holiness the Dalia Lama, 2005, p. 3)

The traumatic oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and the misery of the wildlife—and on the other hand, the happiness of a child being comforted by us—all have a direct influence on our own well-being. Hence, the rationale of interconnectedness behind the theoretical Medicine Wheel of wellness and the many relations in/with which we find ourselves are indexical of fluid, Indigenous worldview/s about health and healing. These are often communicated through story-telling (Dion Stout, 2009; Graveline, 1998; Kenny, 2006; Loiselle and McKenzie, 2006; McCormick, 2005; Mehl-Madrone, 2005; Williams, Labonte and O'Brien, 2003). Joe helps me understand his storyteller/listener preparedness before each WAVS meeting; two of five evenings a week he leaves his work at Matque Prison to drive the rush-hour traffic trail back into Vancouver and straight to WAVS.

*That's why I stay outside [on the sidewalk, visiting with members in their circle of smokers]. Until I'm ready to go in. Smoke my cigarette and get ready [physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually].* (December 15, 2010)

I believe that being a respectable Aboriginal storyteller means to understand my role, purpose and preparedness in life. However, storytelling as a means of understanding community or environmental relations does not occur within Indigenous cultures alone. William Faulkner (1897-1962), an early American Southern writer, understood the value of wholistic human nature as indicative of collaborative achievement, rather than being secondarily about individual, paradigmatic contributions. Faulkner was greatly influenced by the history of his family and the region in which they lived. Mississippi marked his sense of humour, his sense of the tragic position of Blacks and Whites and his very characterization of Southern characters and timeless themes. I have read that Faulkner endorses his readers in this way: 'Don't bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself'. Aboriginal peoples' movement towards reclamation of harmonious well-being does not involve comparisons to one's neighbors: In the Elder's room inside the First Nations House of Learning on UBC's Point Grey campus, a framed message of wisdom reminds students and faculty members alike that "The honour of one is the honour of all." First Nations peoples' reverence for one another and for our animate world surrounding and living within us involves relational respect and responsibility.

*Respectful, responsible, relevant, reciprocal and relational* Aboriginal research is paramount to the past, present and future healing of Aboriginal peoples and collaboratively, the Aboriginal families that WAVS serves. IM is not a western-structured, limited framework. Rather, IM is about adaptation: re-thinking, re-membling, re-juvenating and re-healing our lives. Indigenous relational survival also includes viewing multiple colonial policies through my/our innate Indigenous adaptability to evolving, socio-personal experiences.

### **Adaptability**

The movement of selected or necessary *adaptations*, to me, re/presents a second key element of IM, something I am all too familiar with. Dystonia, a neurological disorder layering itself upon my Cerebral Palsy since birth, is the newest 'settler-condition' to threaten my sustainability of daily energy levels. It has sought to colonize me: like family violence,

perpetrated, received or witnessed, I did not invite it. I have not welcomed it into my life, and I do not agree with its values and ideologies. Nevertheless, although I do not appreciate its legacy of negative health impacts, I am learning how to adapt and to live as dynamically as possible. In other words, as Western derived colonialism has done to Aboriginal peoples, Dystonia since 2005, has usurped me—its every decision-making process controls me. It oppresses and discriminates against what I would prefer to do or say; therefore, my situational adaptability is crucial to my balanced wellness. My wholistic capabilities teach me how carefully I must now attend to spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual tasks at any given moment, such as day-to-day tasks like walking, driving, speaking, cooking, carrying items and attending community or university gatherings as often as I would have previously chosen to attend. But WAVS is a different matter—through sheer determination, I attend nearly 18 months of Monday evening co-ed meetings, sometimes Thursday meetings with the women only, and every celebration ceremony and community fundraiser they/we plan.

During one of the group sessions I note,

*Joe doesn't have an eagle feather to pass around as each group member introduced his or herself. In its absence, he picked up a blue felt pen from his standing flipchart and passed it to the person to his left, saying, 'This is our Sacred Feather for tonight.' I feel as though I am witnessing profound traditional sacredness. In terms of Indigenous worldview(s), that pen has indeed been symbolically transformed into an Eagle feather. (Group Meeting Field Note, June 21, 2010)*

James Waldram (1993) describes symbolic healing as

a process which is occurring in Canadian penitentiaries and which involves Aboriginal offenders in cultural awareness and educational programs. Participants must first receive the necessary education to allow them to identify with the healing symbols so that healing may ensue and both the healers and the patients must engage in a process of redefining their cultures in search of a common cultural base. (p. 346)



Shawn Wilson (2008) states,

Part of the importance of developing an Indigenous research paradigm is that we can use methods and forms of expression that we judge to be valid for ourselves. We can get past having to justify ourselves as Indigenous to the dominant society and academia. We can develop our own criteria for judging the usefulness, validity and worth of Indigenous research and writing. (p. 40)

Wilson implores us to reflect upon the relationality between Indigenous peoples and their knowledges and the adaptability available to them to move past some static scientific rationales and empirical research demands in order to embrace traditional knowledges as valid and worthy of sound research footings. As one final illustration of adaptability, when giving honoraria to Aboriginal friends who support the work I do, I am unable to handwrite in their thank-you cards. Instead, I briefly explain that the blank card a gift—one that they can pass forward. The ways in which I approach my work from the traditional knowledge I learn to the contemporary ways I practice them become heightened as my own creative forms of expression. Present-day lexes of Indigenous knowledges and traditions include language, culture, traditions, foods, simplicity, commonsense and ways of being and knowing (Dion Stout, Kipling and Stout, 2001; Haig-Brown, 1988; Chrisjohn, Young and Marun, 2006; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP), 1996). Returning to the food-specific, cultural example I mention in chapter 2, I consider these traditional recipes evidentiary of my matriarchal family members' Indigenous adaptation, which I feel has sustained me across time and place.

In contrast, not being able to adapt one's traditions and culture over time—in fact, losing said traditions and culture results in a form of poverty that is complex to solve and goes beyond the lack of funds and material comforts that first come to mind for many people when they are asked to define 'poverty'. Imagining myself without this wealth of culture, passed down from my *kokums* to guide me, I am reminded of Fredrich Nietzsche who is famously quoted as saying, 'When you look into an abyss, the abyss [relationally and adaptability], looks into you'. Without purposeful reflection we risk forgetting about the wealth love offers—a wealth of belonging and of knowing. Traditional practices, abilities and intergenerational teachings are indeed relational to participants and other community members. Nietzsche's words also confront my pragmatic realism. My family's matrilineal

culinary skills, as with so many other ways of wisdom once showcased in high esteem for centuries are slowly dissipating. The first way, in my opinion, is socially. The inter-connections of mainstay family dinners have decreased. Gone are the days of desired, if not mandated Sunday meals at home with nucleus and/or extended family members over a feast of roast beef, pork or cured ham, mashed or baked potatoes, gravy and oven-baked biscuits and fresh fruit pies. The second way is within our contemporary times of mobility. The accessibility of food, a Chicken/Caesar-wrap or a grilled Panini-sandwich, sold in every urban street corner-café has replaced those earlier traditional gatherings. Lastly, the cost of a meal-on-the-go, that wrap or sandwich for \$5.00 has become relatively inexpensive as an individual meal. Paradoxically, intergenerational learning can be about collective maintenance of culture—or about separatism from cultural practices, if children are disconnected from their culture by the lack of awareness of parents/grandparents. This disconnection results in a lack of wholeness of identity where Indigenous worldviews and methodological ways would otherwise offer a peaceful toward a (since identity is always evolving) completeness of identity. Another Zen teaching confirms that

We tend to separate what something is from what we believe it is not. Take, as an example, a water jug. The fact is the space around it is also the jug; the space between the handle and body creates the handle, the space inside creates the jug, the space around it separates the jug from you (Lee, 2000, p. 14).

Similarly, Indigenous theories and methodologies

include a way of knowing that is fluid and experiential, [and thus adaptable over time] derived from teachings transmitted from generation to generation by storytelling; each story is alive with the nuances and wisdom of the storyteller and arise from interrelationships from the human world, the spirit and the inanimate intimacies of the ecosystem. (Brown and Strega, 2005, p. 27)

Such knowledges and methods of learning and of doing are practical and purposeful organic and heartfelt and in their inanimate intimacies are emphasized through places, spaces and inter-generational knowledge explorations.

As a woman of Algonquin, Métis, English, Irish and Scottish inter-generations, I am a Western-raised academic who is actively engaged with collaborative research. The framework that guides me is the Medicine Wheel, comprised of both theoretical and methodological wholistic ways towards wellness. It is the same symbolic healing tool that WAVS employs to assist its members.

### **3.3 The Medicine Wheel: A Balanced Path To Health And Wellbeing**

There are four dimensions of “true learning.” These four aspects of every person’s nature are reflected in the four cardinal points of the medicine wheel. These four aspects of our being are developed through the use of our volition or will. It cannot be said that a person has totally learned in a whole and balanced manner unless all four dimensions of her being have been involved in the process (Lane, Bopp, Bopp, & Brown, 1985, p. 29).

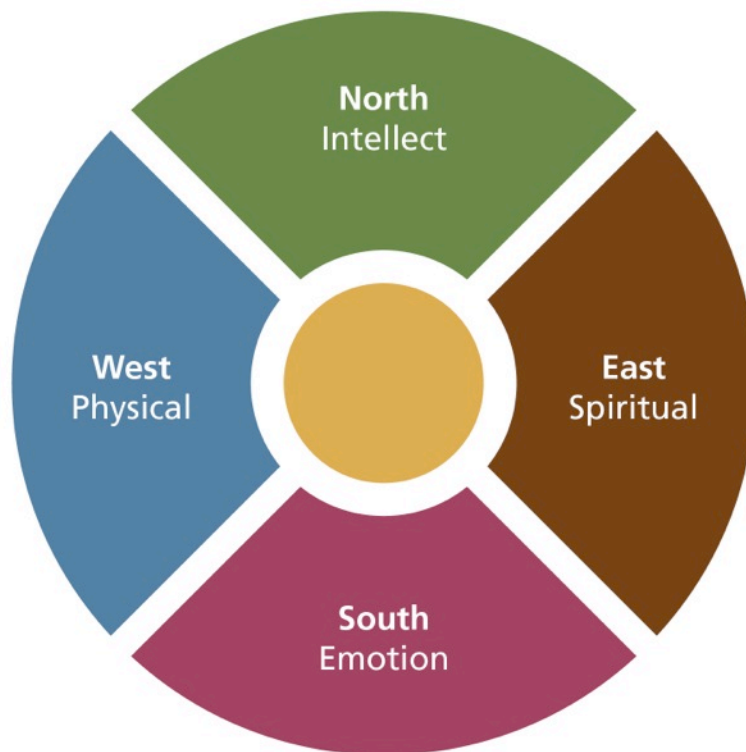
Aboriginal perceptions of well-being are realized in several different ways, one of which is reported in the Medicine Wheel. Described by Cree people at Four Directions Teachings, the Medicine Wheel is often used as a traditional and/or symbolic model to guide people toward harmonious well-being. Symbolically indicative of a relationship with and between individuals and the four elements and seasons of nature and the four dimensions of the individual: the spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual (Castellano, 2000; Drumbrill and Green, 2008; Graveline, 2000; Hill, 2008; Lane et al., 2004; Loiselle and McKenzie, 2006; Iseke-Barnes, 2003; WAVS, 2003). Loiselle and McKenzie (2006) offer a fully ecological and wholistic approach using elements of the Medicine Wheel as an intervention strategy for “problem solving, for enhancing one’s awareness and understanding of self and for restoring healthy relationships and general well-being” (p. 11). Warriors offers a wholistic focus that is more than a method; it is a way of being (Orr, 2000). The Medicine Wheel allows me to understand my socio-personal experiences and to make sense of the world in which I live.

It is important to note that the circular models presented in the RHS cultural framework are not medicine wheels. Medicine wheels are

related to sacred teachings and understandings that are not discussed in the [report's] cultural framework, primarily because of the diversity of Indigenous Knowledge across First Nations (First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey: the Peoples' Report (RHS) 2007, p. 2).

The framework that I use throughout my ICR predominately involves the Indigenous Medicine Wheel as symbolic of harmonious well-being. Nevertheless, I emphasize that our lives, particularly those of the participants, are not cookie-cutter designs nor are my/our chosen terminologies. By using the Medicine Wheel as a theoretical and symbolic methodological framework, WAVS nor I suggest that our personalities, experiences and interpretations ebb and flow throughout each Medicine Wheel dimension as our spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual experiences and insights arise and depart. I consider the white spaces to represent opportunities of openings as reflections and self-choices of re/direction. Consider music for example. I have heard it said that the instrumental notes played do not make the sounds of harmony but rather, it is the rests between notes that do. Figure 3.1, on the following page and its accompanying text provides a brief synthesis of the wholistic focus that a Medicine Wheel can offer in terms of traditional/contemporary Aboriginal peoples' wellbeing on which I elaborate more in each of the following chapters of my dissertation.

**Figure 3.3:** The Symbolic Medicine Wheel: A Balanced Path to Health and Well-being



- **East – Spiritual:** Prayer, meditation, smudging, drumming, song, dance, a connection to the land, sweatlodges, Elders and tradition.
- **South – Emotional:** Love, respect, joy, care, laughter, friends and loved ones, support groups, acceptance from family and community, feeling of contributions to family and community.
- **West – Physical:** access to medical support and services, a clean safe place to live, nutrition and exercise, help with addictions, anti-retroviral medicines, alternative and traditional medicines.
- **North – Intellectual:** Understanding the virus and medicines, adapting and accepting life changes, learning and sharing about prevention, living with a positive attitude, keeping up to date on new information and an awareness of services and support available.

Re/learning balanced ways of being rests on traditional healing practices that remain paramount to a strong sense of health and wellness for many Aboriginal Peoples. Family Violence, both directly and indirectly, affects our Elders, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews. For many First Nations peoples healing from violence is complex. Traditional and contemporary Indigenous ways of healing include the awareness and honour of life with respect for self, others and environment by living in balance. Bridging the gap between ancestral wisdom and present-day healing practices remains vital for urban Aboriginal peoples. One such philosophical approach is Aboriginal storytelling. *I really believe that telling our stories is a part of our healing. Our stories are blood memory and collective*, says Joyce (Personal Field Note, January 18, 2010).

Important to my/our study, within IM, ways of knowing are often taught and learned through Aboriginal storytelling. The transformative power of Aboriginal storytelling is evident in the WAVS violence intervention model, whereby facilitators and members alike are encouraged to share at appropriate times, their past in order to heal their present-day struggles and future health and well-being. Yes, there are other agencies throughout Vancouver that assist with families and violence but at this time only WAVS provides the traditional tools and ways of knowing specific to the needs of Urban Aboriginal families (Joyce Fossella, Personal Communication, January 6, 2010; Vancouver Status of Women Resource Guide, 2007). I next survey Aboriginal storytelling as an effective method of healing.

### 3.4 Storytelling in Traditional and Contemporary Ways Of Healing

*I have heard researchers, after twenty years into their careers, suggest that the new people they've met for projects are telling the same stories. Has nothing changed—not the people sharing their individual life-stories, not the disheartening content of their stories—how is this possible? Every man or woman, child or family with whom a researcher meets, every story of survival, past and ongoing trauma, resilience, healing, happiness and joy, while sharing degrees of similarities, whom a researcher listens to, by virtue of inherency, are unique. How do we honour the stories that retell the realities of our world? To seek similarities and differences without ignoring one or the other is essential. People are unique and so are their stories. Each offers a glint of new perspectives from which people can learn. (Personal Field Note, October 23, 2009)*

Is it reasonable to expect the disheartening content of people's lives to disappear? Might we therefore, assume that sadness or pain can disappear from literature, art or music—subjects so central to the human condition? Living content as well as context will always exist, yet each situation is also unique. Whether meaningful methodologies with Indigenous peoples be labeled as PAR or as ICR, the welcome mat is not only a signifier that a community agency's door is open. It is also an invitation to develop respectful relations before any research begins. Why? Why, for the first time did I pick up a dead squirrel? I do not feel nearly equipped to give an unequivocal answer. Yet inter-connectedly I know that I can turn to Indigenous Knowledge Systems for ancestral reasoning, understanding and pedagogy. My/Our focus on the WAVS model of family violence prevention and intervention includes the following two socio-personal/interrelated methods of informative praxis.

#### 3.4.1 Indigenous Storytelling

Jo-ann Archibald re/defines storytelling as *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit*, the title and content of her 2008 book in which she created the term 'Storywork' because "I needed a term that signified that our stories and storytelling

needed to be taken seriously” (p. 3). She theorizes seven principles that help to define Aboriginal storytelling for educational and wholistic purposes that are a valued connection to health and healing. The author’s circular framework about ‘Storywork’ includes respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness and synergy. I ground my work in Archibald’s framework in advocacy for our experiential stories to be understood within the contexts of Indigenous worldviews and education. I then scaffold my own storytelling methods and protocols by engaging in storywork pedagogy through active ICR perspectives and methods.

Another way of storytelling is through song. There became a time and revitalization for musically talented members in her *Lil’wat* family, as was strongly encouraged by her parents. Songs became a vital connection for Joyce’s family. Although singing in their own language (*Stl’atl’imx*) was difficult at times, the family singing group, *Tzo’kam*, always turned to their mom for cultural and song guidance in translations and in sounding better by pronouncing *Stl’atl’imx* words correctly (Lester-Smith and Fossella, 2011). Lewis Mehl-Madrona (2005) integrates storytelling into his medical practice to enhance healing. His belief is that hearing stories of healing told by a peer is intrinsic to healing; it enables a person to imagine his/her own healing. “Stories from the oral tradition, also called myths or legends, provide valuable insight into the cognitive orientation or health-world view, guiding the health beliefs of aboriginal peoples” (Turton 1997, p. 2). WAVS members confirm that hearing the personal stories of the facilitators who have healed from intimate partner violence as a method pointing towards potential change. Many feel the program offers inspiration and hope that they, too, can make positive changes in their lives “to the extent that the story is incorporated—consumed, digested, internalized—the possibility that it will become true grows” (Mehl-Madrona, 2005, p. 3). Stories also convey the means of transformation. They hold the wisdom that allows for change, spiritual growth and alternative/positive outcomes to living problems. His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and Farber (2005) mention traditional Buddhist storytellers traversed nomadic communities and “hanging their elaborate paintings in a convenient place, would chant an account of what the pictures revealed, while pointing out details with a long stick” (p. 2). As a practitioner of Western medicine, Mehl-Madrona believes healing is a negotiation of story. Storytelling alone cannot provide restoration of health but can aid in the instruction of growth and change. The main focus of WAVS’ intervention program is to end violent and abusive behavior and to help members feel better about themselves. Group participants are



encouraged to take ownership of their past decisions and actions by openly discussing the way in which they have been violent towards other people in their family.

### **3.4.2 Storytelling at Warriors Against Violence Society**

The transformative power of Aboriginal storytelling is evident in Warriors' violence intervention model. Facilitators and members alike share their past soul-wounds in order to heal their present-day health struggles toward their future well-being. Members confirm that hearing the personal stories of the facilitators who have healed from family violence themselves and base their healing on their Elders' ways of being is key. They offer inspiration and hope that members, too, can make positive changes in their lives. This particular methodology is the cornerstone of transformative life-stories about WAVS and is explored throughout the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

As community Elders, Joe and Dan (before his passing) often share with members that they too were once scared, skeptical, humbled and sometimes defiant of taking full responsibility for their violence towards their families. But the men did know this—they wanted to and needed to, heal. Taking personal responsibility is a crucial action within my doctoral studies with WAVS. I must understand the very cultural sensitivities of staff, members and the intervention model-philosophies if I am permitted anyone's trust at WAVS and for participants to share with me their stories of abuse and of healing. Unfortunately, some members have moved away from their innate knowledge of responsibility and respect for all humans. Parker counters: *I just want to someday leave this world a little bit better than when I came into it* (Guidance Committee Field Note, October 2, 2009). Both fortunately and sadly, he did so on May 22, 2010, passing away from cancer. I listened many times to Parker telling members that after seven generations of sleeping and protecting their wisdom, our Ancestors are now waking and once again voicing their guidance to us, to those peoples ready to learn from them. I infer from Parker's Elderly insistence the value of all voices, even the most sequestered ones. Facilitators and members alike refer to the sharing circle as a safe healing space.

Traditional and present-day talking circles provide a safe and respectful space in which all members are given the chance to share their still-small voices of conscience without fear of criticism or judgment. WAVS does not judge, condemn or dehumanize any of its members and is inclusive of a diversity of clientele, including both men and women

receivers and perpetrators of violence. As a participant Terry comments, *[When] we're sitting in the circle, everyone is treated as equals and we're all equals. [In] the healing circle our facilitators are there but they're participants also because they get to tell their story, too, so we can relate to them* (March 16, 2011). WAVS sharing circles are open to co-ed members on Monday evenings and then men and women separately on Thursday evenings. Michael, both a participant and a member of my Guidance Committee emphasizes the importance of men learning how to communicate: *Honesty helps the participants, they share stories and they realize they are not alone. It is not where you've been but where you are going. That is the support we give one another in the WAVS groups* (Personal Field Note, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009). Group-member feedback is a central component to the WAVS model—as a necessity of life, storywork heals; however, sometimes patience is needed. A third participant, M., describes.

*There were times when I couldn't speak. I couldn't even stop crying. I would be heartbroken. I mean, I'm still heartbroken now but I've accepted it. I've learned to accept it and I've learned to be grateful, having such wonderful brothers and sisters, because I remember all the good things about them.*  
(March 3, 2011)

Customarily, a sacred eagle feather or an Aboriginal carved 'talking stick' is passed around the sharing circle. The person holding the sacred item is the only speaker at the time, while all others respectfully listen and remain silent until their turn to speak. When done respectfully circle participation reflects the basic traditional and philosophical worldview of Aboriginal peoples regardless of whether it is done from a healing perspective, a teaching approach or as a path to problem solving. The self-help tool of honesty in storytelling becomes crucial to healing from past traumas, present-day wellness and future familial and community optimal wellbeing.

About the multi-directional pathway of healing circles, Jeanette Armstrong describes the Okanagan Indian Band peoples' *En'owkinwixw* Discourse Model as a means to learn from principal voices and also from sequestered, weaker voices. She advocates for listening to all people and for respecting diversity. The *En'owkinwixw* process activates creativity; it supports and encourages even the most quiet, unexpected persons from which answers, viewpoints and solutions might arise. Armstrong contends that everybody can offer what uniqueness lives inside of them (2000). She shows the value of all storytellers, regardless of

how foremost or marginalized their voices have become. Norton (2007) reminds us that the verb 'become' is fluid and its consequential meaning is dependent on a number of factors.

Every time we speak, we are negotiating and renegotiating our sense of self in relation to the larger social world and reorganizing that relationship across time and space. Our gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientations, among other characteristics, are all implicated in this negotiation of identity. (pp. 1-2)

In other words, she teases apart the unfamiliarity of this familiar verb for us. WAVS applies the Indigenous traditional circle as a format for re/organizing exchange and discussion, which lends itself to being more trusting and non-judgmental; all participants have a voice and are given a turn to contribute. The circle structure also stands in contrast to a Westernized boardroom setting, where an executive sits at the end of a long rectangular-shaped table. In this setting those sitting along the sides of the table fill a subordinate but ranked roles with some chance of contributing but the head makes the final decision.

### **3.5 Study Methods**

It's a hope that flickers in the very survival of our nations, the fact that we are still here. That we have, in many cases, an unbroken succession of leadership. That my son and I are responsible for safeguarding into the future. In this I feel a great sense of hope and opportunity. And in all this, Canada has, in my view and in the view, I think, of a growing number of people, a tremendous and shared state of turning this around. Living together, respecting one another and supporting one another. (Grand National Chief Shawn Atleo, Guest Speaker, Vancouver Board of Trade, April 7, 2011)

As a leader in my family, community and scholarly responsibilities, I begin to re/grasp my dream-knowledges, animal knowledges and what IM involves. To do so I must once again become aware of my personal need for visual representations. To demarcate my own learning style, in the past, when peers have asked me to define the differences between

methodology and method, I reach deep into my mind for that ‘most helpful’ descriptive structure: that of a small greenhouse. In the early 1990s, my family and I built a greenhouse in our back yard. In hindsight this particular wooden structure re/presented a *methodological* framework and the *methods* we used were the tools with which we built it: the 2x4 wood planks, measuring tape, saw, hammer and nails and transparent plastic sheeting. In my present academic work, I seek the best tangible, textual and definable—as opposed to a more abstract—framework from which to anchor my methodological underpinnings.

The naming, design and piloting of participants’ invitational prompt questions are based on my/our original two research questions: “How does WAVS articulate and conceptualize its cultural components and their importance of being implemented and received as an intervention model for healing from family violence?” And, “How does the WAVS intervention model impact and support members wishing to heal from both their intergenerational and contemporary perceptions and experiences of family violence?” Participant teachings are sought using an interpretive thematic analysis based on qualitatively derived data (Anderson, 2001; Barnes, 2000; Denzin, 1997), based on participant-invitational guide questions:

### **Broad Introductory Questions**

- Can you tell me about the men and women who come to WAVS?
- In your experience, what brings the women to WAVS?
- What kinds of supports do you offer clients? (Past? Present? Prospective?)
- Can you tell me about your experiences working with clients who access WAVS?  
Can you think of a time that was most successful? Most challenging?
- In your experience, what influences Aboriginal men and women to access WAVS?
- Are there issues specific to Aboriginal peoples seeking healing (from family violence) services?
- What are some of the key issues that clients are dealing with when they come to WAVS? And surrounding issues?
- What kinds of resources might new clients be looking for to feel safe?
- What is your understanding of the kinds of services that are most helpful to Aboriginal men and women healing from family violence?
- What resources might you know as being least helpful?

- Do former WAVS clients stay in touch with the organizations? If they do, what are their reasons for doing so?

### **Legacy Questions**

- If you could share your wisdom and insights about your experiences with family violence and with WAVS, what might these be?
- Where do you see WAVS and/or yourself in five years' time?

### **Closing Questions**

- Is there anything you would like to share that hasn't come up today?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me or want me to clarify for you?

I then turn to my Elder Roberta for her confirmation about the respect and appropriateness of these questions. Following her approval I send them on to my Aboriginal Guidance Committee and to my university supervisory committee for final feedback. Everyone concurs that my inquiries are culturally-based and positive ones. As White, Suchowierska and Campbell (2004) contend,

The first step in starting a positive relationship with potential collaborators is to approach them in a manner that shows mutual respect and equality and not 'experimental colonialism.' If the research project is to be conducted in an organizational setting, the researchers may start establishing linkages with an organization by identifying informants who can explain local traditions and philosophy and introduce the research[er]... (p. 8)

First because I have attended WAVS since 2009 as a research assistant on another project for the first year, I have already built strong relationships with both Warriors staff and a number of members. Thus, I am able to personally offer both a verbal invitation and a pamphlet about the study to persons attending WAVS who are above the age of 19 (the legal age of majority in British Columbia). As well as present and past members, the agency's facilitators also support the study by individually meeting with me for conversations. Past clients are contacted by Joyce Fossella, executive director at WAVS, and offered an invitation to contact me by telephone or by email if interested in finding out

further information about the research. However, I already know most participants from present and past group-night meetings. Once a potential research participant is identified and briefed on the project in person, telephone or email s/he and I set a date and time for meeting together. Our face-to-face conversations take place at a setting of his/her choice either at WAVS in the early evening before a group night meeting or in the daytime at a local café. No matter the location, I purchase or bring with me snacks and beverages for sharing.

Participant demography varies in a number of ways: All but one participant self identifies as a First Nations or Aboriginal person. Through no planned intention, 11 men and 11 women contribute to this study. Their ages range from 29 to 63 and their household incomes fall between “Nil” to above \$40,000. Listed occupations include “retired from a life of crime”, counsellor, unemployed, disability pension, child-minder, social worker and Health Canada employee.

At the time of our meetings I give each participant a gift card with \$25 cash, two transit tickets and a single tea package (my personal signature gift to remind us of warm and cozy kitchen-visits with our ancestral and/or Elderly grandmothers). I honour all participants with the same when we later meet to confirm, discuss and correct anything from our first recorded and transcribed conversations. Of the 22 participants in total, six of eight presently attending WAVS members and two of four former attending members meet with me for a second member-checking/confirmation visit. The Tri-council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans strongly recommends “building reciprocal, trusting relationships will take time” (p. 105). Although facilitators do not have an official second visit with me, we remain in close contact through group-night meetings, board and fundraising meetings, telephone and email communication. All participants receive a copy of their cleaned transcript and those with whom I meet for a second time also receive a gifted journal and pen tucked inside an 8x10 envelope with their honourarium cards. By the term ‘cleaned’ I mean that electronic files and hardcopies are combed through for identifiable markers such as names, common places, dates and some ‘ums’ and ‘ah’ pauses commonly spoken as opposed to printed. For participants who do not feel the need to meet with me for a second time, I give them the choice of receiving their transcript from me in person, by mail or as an email attachment (each transcript is completely anonymized before all delivery modes).

As a second mode of storytelling and learning, I facilitate one sharing circle (or focus group as usually referred to in mainstream terms) that consisted of six participants led by

Elder, Roberta. Although White Owl was not participant at this event, he eloquently describes the meaning of this tradition.

*When you sit in the circle and you share your life story that's what brings closeness. That builds a relationship, life is a relationship. We have relationships with friends, brothers, sisters, daughters—When you sit in-group with someone and you share that story, you build that relationship.*  
(December 9, 2010)

Focus groups or Aboriginal traditional sharing circles operate on the premise that all participants are equal, respected and offer a culturally-respectful format for participants to articulate their feelings and concerns and to learn from one another (Vedan, 2002). Although I am prepared with my guiding prompt questions, the circle held on December 1, 2010 evolves ever-more naturally into a taking-turns storytelling setting where each member simply shares about him/herself including heritage, family background and what brought him/her to WAVS and the study.

The third method I practice throughout the study is participant observations, the cornerstone of many personal and meeting field notes. As previously mentioned, I have actively been attending WAVS group meetings over a lengthy period of time: six 4-month weekly sessions of the organization's co-educational (men and women) and occasionally the women's only, socio-education support groups as a way of "value-based partnership[s]" (White, Suchowierska and Campbell, 2004, p. S3). Building a foundation of trust and collaboration includes "active listening, ongoing invitations to collaborate, mutual understanding and meeting people where they are at help build this foundation" (Ochocka, Janzen and Nelson, 2002, p. 385).

In all, participant stories shared with me include 22 people; 30 individual conversations amounting to 50 hours of digitally recorded material; and one set of email exchanges (with Bruce Wood, Change of Seasons co-founder who, at the time of our communication, was living in the United States). Our transcribed conversations amass to approximately 600 pages of single-spaced text. The sheer volume of lifetime knowledge that participants share feels like a scaffolding exercise. Together we tease apart an onion, sometimes making us tear-up and other times not, one layer at a time. While doing so we scaffold our learning experiences one story at a time. Material emerges like baby steps—slowly, patiently, one foot in front of the other—from a series of semi-structured research

questions meant to understand what reasons WAVS has been a transformative force in theirs, their children's and their grandchildren's lives. My researcher learnings travel a similar though descending route as I convert, condense and interpret 600 pages of storywork into the general size of this 200-page dissertation, of which roughly only 60-100 pages of participant and researcher-based knowledge is discussed throughout.

After attaining UBC's Board of Ethics approval (November 24, 2010), I hold an 'Honouring Ceremony' at WAVS—meant to explain in greater detail our evaluative look at WAVS; encourage open dialogue between potential participants and myself; and honour those who had in some way supported my work thus far. Events such as at this Warriors are usually family evenings of food, friendship, recognition, gratitude and gifting. I invite members by word of mouth and event posters over the course of two prior weeks' notice at evening co-ed, men's and women's groups. I prepare and shop for enough food for 50 people and also made and bought small gifts for 50 men, women and children, such as beaded key chains, gloves, socks, journals, candles, mugs, magnets and other little surprises. I present gift bags to some people, like community members of my guidance committee and the WAVS board of directors, co-facilitators and group members/participants like Patrick and Donna, warriors who always arrive early to set up meeting room furniture and contribute meal items and Millie and Stephanie, daycare workers who look after members' children while they attend groups. We begin the evening with a prayer from Roberta Price who is Coast Salish. At the end of cleaning up from the incredibly energized evening Joyce asks me, *Where did you learn to put on an Honouring Ceremony like that?* She seems genuinely surprised at my answer: *From you, Joyce*. Already considering the future, I plan to hold a study-completion Honouring feast in late 2012.

### 3.6 Methodological Tensions

Although throughout my work with WAVS facilitators and members I have not run into any negative tensions, nevertheless, there are two main challenges that both participants and I face. The first is *confidentiality* and the second, I call, *researcher-reality*.

First, in keeping to the theme that Warriors has shown and invited over the years, sharing circle members indeed become like family to one another and on a lesser scale, to myself as researcher. Our confidentiality is tested. It is unpreventable that some regularly-attending members become aware of each other as study participants. Honoured to help



WAVS and equally appreciative of my efforts to do likewise, they often acknowledge our planned research conversations in open spaces. Some of our visits are held within the Kiwassa Neighbourhood House in which WAVS resided. I arrive early, for instance, to meet with Gerry at 5:00 pm before a meeting and then slip out at break time around 8:00 to talk alone with Freda. Group attendees cross the meeting room to speak with one another during start, finish and break times to confirm, post-pone or rebook appointments with me. Some reference me during their meeting check-ins as David, a former member tells all during his circle check-in: *I came tonight to help my sister* (Group Meeting Field Note, November 29, 2010). They/we share commonalities as well as differences; members talk, hug, cry, validate, challenge, encourage, get annoyed with and speak highly of one another. They also exchange contact information as a sense of supportive belonging. *The people in this room are your greatest resources*, Joe often reiterates. I consider this valuable affirmation:

*What he is doing is encouraging people to rely on one another, to reach out if they are in difficulty, to telephone and to trust the people in this room, on this particular evening, Joe states, 'In this room we are all teachers.' He asks, 'Who will you be teacher to?' So he really is challenging healing and wellness and passing on our knowledge and good medicines (i.e. attitudes, learnings and teachings) that are all positive—making sure that we share our 'good medicine' with others.* (Group Meeting Field Note, September 27, 2010)

Within this kind of communal environment few secrets exist.

The second tension I note throughout the study also resides in relations and is that which I refer to as researcher-reality. In some ways it involves only that relationship with myself. In others it involves participants and myself in our conversations together. I offer a few examples below:

- From my Researcher, Personal Field Note about Patsy and my conversation:  
*Here's a huge learning curve in that literally, she calls me on something and then I agree and call myself on something too. It is the way I assumed by asking her that whatever continuing education program she is signing up for, would probably be at Native Education College, simply because my friend Roberta is taking their 2-year Aboriginal Tourism program and another participant is enrolled in their 2-*

*year Community Counselling program. Patsy is gentle with me but yeah, I sure blew that one.* (December 17, 2010)

- From my Researcher, Personal Field Note about meeting with Gerry: *When I phone him to book our appointment with him, he says something about 'not feeling the greatest.'* So I say, *'Oh, that's not good. What do you think's going on that you're not feeling good lately?'* He replies, *'Ah, has our interview started over the phone now?'* I feel quite startled; I am simply calling as a friendly reminder. *Although I apologize to Gerry, I feel as though Gerry is taking me to task by letting me know that I crossed a line, a place in which he is not willing to go.* (December 5, 2010)
- From my second visit with David: *I was reading our conversation and you were talking about your disappointment in confidentiality on a few occasions and I just wondered more about that. As researcher, I seem to have little hesitation about jumping right into a contentious topic. Not necessarily a negative move but certainly one based on strong relationships with participants.* (February 28, 2011)
- From Patrick and my visit, when he shares that he and Donna have plans to visit her family back East at Christmas time: I chide him, *'So would this be a first for you, flying without cuffs and a trench coat draped over your wrists?'* But he holds his own, *'Yeah, Con-Air, been on that airline before.'* (December 8, 2010)

The last tension I wholistically experience throughout this dissertational process is more personal. Reflecting upon my doctoral/researcher role now expected to stake a bolder claim to ownership of the important work that WAVS and I research, interpret and contribute to the field of health, I feel perplexed. Indeed, I have learned that when attaching my name to research, community engagement, scholarly writing or to mentoring Aboriginal students who seek my assistance, I do so with the 5 Rs of Indigenous Research Ethics, integrity and meaningful effort. Yet rarely do I lay claim to ownership of these endeavours. Perhaps it is less a matter of what I *own* and more a matter of *how* I actively advance the pragmatic illusions of that which I could but do not lay claim to ownership. Rather, by demonstrating my commitment to sharing my revelations and perceptions of Indigenous knowledges that help to define new directions for Aboriginal-based education, I believe my academic/communal

engagements contribute to transforming awareness and opportunities for all.

Here, I offer three specific examples. I had not set out to write an entire 4-year dissertation in the present tense. It was not until half way through proofreading one of my first full-length drafts that I discovered I was doing so; it was then that I began the more concentrated effort to hone this uniqueness. Shunryu Suzuki (2011) describes concentrative action in this way:

When you do something, if you fix your mind on the activity with some confidence, the quality of your state of mind is the activity itself. When you are concentrating on the quality of your being, you are prepared for the activity (p. 93).

The Zen monk does not refer at all to ownership but to the quality of knowing what it is we are doing through awareness. When contributing to Monday evening potlatch dinners at WAVS meetings, I had not decided to become the ‘dessert lady’ but rather, observed that while salads, chicken, shepherd’s pies and lasagna are wholesome foods. If any members are like me, they too might appreciate appeasing our sweet tooth cravings with the occasional fruit pie, trifle or cheese cake. When I began this project with WAVS I had not knowingly imposed any ICR values until I progressively discovered I am living them. From the mundane chores of buying materials, photocopying and stuffing file folders for new members with a journal, a commitment-to-self contract and a control plan safety outline—to the extreme timeliness of writing a small scholarship application with WAVS in mind, successfully being awarded it and then donating the fund to the agency so they could pay for the benefit music CD, *Heartbeats* they had ready for production as a key fundraising effort, save for the sound-engineer’s labour and/or material costs. Through the wisdom of educators like Drs. Jo-ann Archibald, Hartej Gill and Peter Cole and numerous other encouraging professors at UBC, Joe and Joyce and the participants I recognize myself not a Knowledge keeper or owner but as a knowledge doer and a sharer. Ponder this notion: If I were to draw with a felt marker a circle on a white board and ask viewers what it is, some would likely say a circle, a ring, a round diagram, even a donut hole. However, I would suggest it is also a board or a wall with a hole in it. While many researchers might still focus on the drawn circle, I choose to focus on the backdrop behind it. This is what ICR is to me, the background on which everything else leans as a way of describing my/our WAVS research.

### 3.7 Concluding Discussion

*Collaborative Research is the olive branch—hold it out and offer your support.*

~ Roberta (Personal Communication, May 3, 2010)

The term ‘to extend an Olive branch’ has biblical origins and is generally understood to mean an offer of peace or reconciliation. In Ancient Greek and Roman times, people would offer literal Olive branches. In Rome, for example, defeated armies traditionally carried Olive branches to indicate that they were surrendering and the Greeks incorporated Olive branches into weddings and other ceremonies. In contemporary times the Olive branch usually incites metaphor, rather than literal connotations. Moreover, while some might suggest that it takes an immense amount of courage and heavy-heartedness to extend an Olive branch, I understand my Coast Salish Elder, to not mean so. Rather, in a paper titled “Collaborative Research is an Olive Branch—Hold it out and Offer your Unconditional Support” (Lester-Smith, Martin, Parent and Price, 2012), we authors iterate ourselves with hope and gratitude for the positive changes in Aboriginal communities for their renewed health and wellbeing.

In this methodological chapter, I explore a re/discovery of what relationality and adaptability mean to me and therefore, possibly to other Aboriginal peoples to whom I live near and/or work side by side. Whatever knowledge I am blessed to learn I pass forward, as do my/our Ancestors, friends, Roberta, Joe and Joyce and Aboriginal scholars who trust me with their teachings. As a reminder, the questions to which I seek explanations throughout this dissertation are 1) What does an Indigenous methodology look like that combines Indigenous knowledges, Aboriginal storytelling and Indigenous Collaborative Research? And, 2) How can this Indigenous methodology facilitate urban Aboriginal peoples’ health and healing from domestic violence? Throughout this chapter, I convey some of the values I deem inextricably woven into the fabric of Indigenous Collaborative Research. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 re/present conceptual and contextual models of ICR work. Implicit in the cornerstone methodology and methods of my/our collaboration are considerations about some of the features of storytelling in research; how Aboriginal peoples’ storytelling may inform and/or impact community research; what contributions participants might make to research that matters most to them; and what ways storytelling in research can arise through a collaborative approach.

As explained in my theoretical and methodological chapters, Indigenous knowledges and storytelling stand on the pediment of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Such ancestral ways of knowing and being lead me to propose that Aboriginal storytelling positively affects urban Aboriginal peoples' healing from family violence. The nature of IKS and Indigenous storytelling may bring together Western forms of research, ICR and various researchers from diverse contexts like academe, Aboriginal organizations, Aboriginal communities and healthcare providers. I also explore Indigenous and western methodological paradigms that can inter-connectedly shape Aboriginal peoples' health and healing. By interfacing the symbolic Medicine Wheel with *relationality* and *adaptability* I contend that commonsensical-collaborative research can positively contribute to urban Aboriginal peoples' lives. I learn from Elders, scholars and animals who continue to emphasize commonsense—defined as wise thinking that is independent of specialized knowledge or training. Throughout the research processes of writing my comprehensive essays and volunteering closely with WAVS, I witness Aboriginal peoples' relational and adaptable means of well-being. Participants and I are discovering and sharing such ways throughout this dissertation.

The key concepts of *relationality* and *adaptability* can be misconstrued as definitions of the term 'relate to every consumer' regardless of ethnicity, gender, age or to reach populations that were previously uninterested in philosophies, services or products whereby adaption is not organic. As a researcher, I remain vigilant that colonial ways of healing are not re-packaged for Aboriginal peoples disguised as their own cultural practices. Bringing together multiple cultural practices in order to accomplish healing will not be effective for everyone involved until the practices are recognized on equal footing.

Western culture is notorious for appropriating elements of other cultures around the world, revising them into a simplified form and then re-presenting them as products or services that appear to authentically come from their place of origin—but, are inherently Western in ideological basis. Such products seem to overlook, among other things, human existence is *not* individualistic; in the case of healing, it is a process of constant re-negotiation with the people and environment in which one lives. Consequently, a 12-step program to improve our Spiritual/Emotional/Physical/Intellectual dimensions of wellness is not likely sustainable without the interconnectedness with communities or necessary policy changes. Alternatively, were the WAVS intervention model to become recognized and appropriately taught as successful, it could instigate an abundance of local and national organizations seeking to implement Indigenous knowledge and wholistic ways of healing, a move that would be greatly welcomed by all warriors against violence.

## Chapter 4: WAVS' Teachings

*I'm sitting on an isolated beach in Sechelt up the Sunshine Coast North of Vancouver, after coming home with a friend for a writing-retreat weekend. She's gone for a walk along the beach to find treasures. It was about a hundred steps down to the beach from her parent's cottage; the last ten to twenty stairs are actually a wooden ladder where I have to climb down with my bottom facing the ocean, a long enough hike down that I don't have the energy to walk along the sand, the pebbles, the bigger rocks, the driftwood debris and larger logs without falling or hurting so I'm staying put for a while. I can see rocks for miles, water for eternity and white cumulous clouds layering the horizon. The ocean is calm. The seagulls perched at the Pacific's edge are quiet while other birds are slowly forming an orchestra. It strikes me how the birds and the wind and the beach and the living driftwood and the rocks, none of them are judgmental. None of them imply, 'Well, you're certainly off-key today.' They do not criticize one another for interrupting or offering a sound at the right or wrong time. How contrary humans are. That's all we do is judge and criticize and compare. We ego-size one another, determine whether we fit into this or that cacophony of life. (Personal Field Note, June 3, 2011)*

### 4.1 Context

In this chapter, I investigate the challenges that WAVS members have encountered, including prison sentences and poverty lasting for decades; others are painful memories of residential school or family violence/suicide that they carry throughout life. I observe how facilitators encourage a setting for members to speak of these challenges in which judgment is withheld and individuals feel comfortable rather than comparative with or against each other. I believe that this collaborative healing arises from the cultural component of WAVS—its intervention practices based on Aboriginal rituals like storytelling. This is not to say that collaborative healing exists uniquely within Aboriginal culture; it is to say that when people are allowed to use their own cultural practices (rather than foreign practices) to heal, they feel part of a community with shared experiences and understandings and recognize

how their community's knowledge tools, passed down from Elders, can help them negotiate through some dissensions of life. In other words because the agency's members all learn, experience, assess and plausibly follow the WAVS intervention model designed to diminish violence among many First Nations families, each participant in this study, can and does express understandings of contextual, cultural healing practices. I write this chapter to express, through the participants, implicitly or explicitly, what the WAVS model is, does and represents to them as they seek ways to heal from domestic violence. By sharing what participants teach me during our conversations together and through group participation at WAVS, we address the first of my/our two research questions: *How does WAVS articulate and conceptualize its cultural components and their importance of being implemented and received as an intervention model for healing from family violence?*

For my readers' ease, I leave a second reminder of who project participants are: Gerry, Freda, Patrick, Donna, White Owl, Melanie, Terry and Ryan are/were present WAVS members; David, Michael, Patsy and M. are past WAVS members; Roberta Price, Millie, Stephanie and Stuart are sharing circle participants; Joe and Joyce Fossella, Dan and Gail Parker and Leslie Nelson are/were co-facilitators of the agency; and, Bruce Wood is the former program designer the Change of Seasons Program in Squamish, BC.

I/We begin with each of the four directional and physiological dimensions of the Medicine Wheel, explored in chapters two and 3. By scaffolding upon Indigenous Knowledge Systems, the symbolic Medicine Wheel and the participants' complex stories, I can now add three subthemes in each of the four directional quadrants along with a central 5<sup>th</sup> realm, the Sacred-self. Based on participant-knowledges, in the East are Earth, Spiritual and Children; in the South are Emotions, Fire and Youth; in the West are Physical, Water and Adults; and lastly, in the North are Intellectual, Air/Universe and Elders/Ancestors.

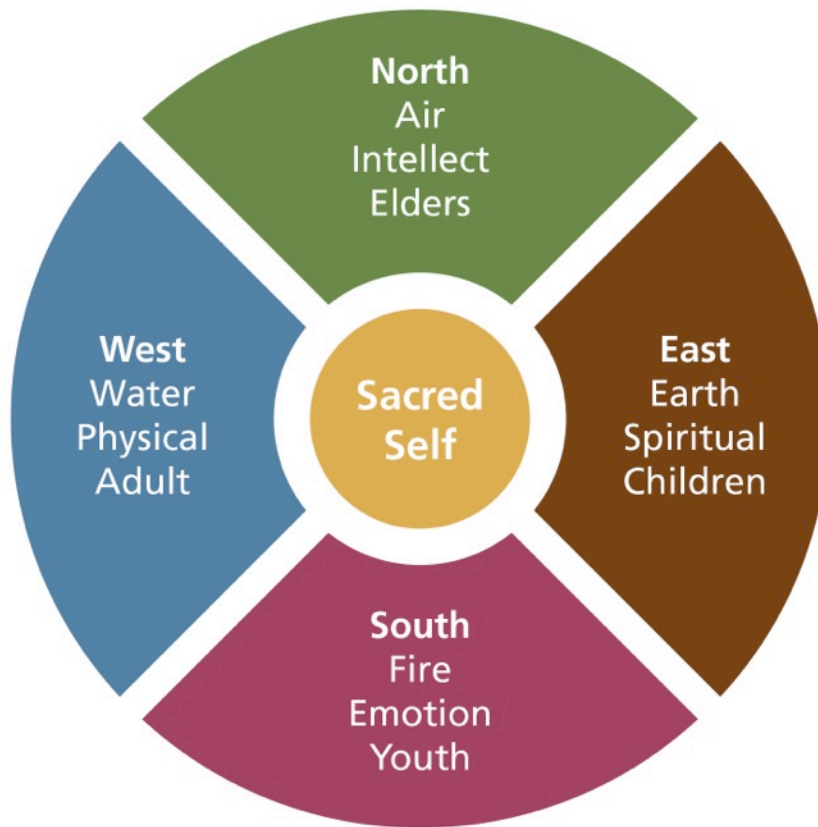
Each of these twelve categories is not exclusive of one another. Some stories are unique, while others remain all too familiar. Participant teachings resonate within most, if not all four of the dimensions and subsequent sub-realms. While all participants share meaningful contributions to multiple sections, within dissertation confinements, I cannot illustratively voice each person's individual themes. Herein lie my researcher-responsibilities to tease apart and choose the most salient life-stories that best fit within each realm. Indeed, I question myself amid our conversations together as to how much intimately personal, historical complex trauma I should be privileged to know in relation to learning about WAVS as a contemporary, seemingly vital, community organization. To White Owl I reflect, *Our conversation seems a long way from Warriors, yet it's not, is it?* He supports, *It's all part of it.*

*It's all part of that stuff. You know, people who are in Warriors Against Violence, your life can't be only that. People have still got to live* (December 9, 2010). He encourages that people who participate in WAVS are people first—with complex lives and interests that seem to converge when they meet at WAVS for healing.

Key teachings of this study suggest that in order to better support families wishing to understand the negative legacies of colonialism in Canada and to heal from such systemic violence, the components of the Medicine Wheel should be revisited in more detail. Let us now travel around it with Figure 4.1's structural guidance, below, much like the Earth rotates around the Sun. Although there is not necessarily a right or wrong starting point, for the purposes of cohesion I start in the East, *the dawning of awareness*, as Donna, a participant, calls her healing journey.



**Figure 4.1:** The Symbolic Medicine Wheel of Health, Wholeness and Harmony



## 4.2 Participatory Healing At WAVS

### 4.2.1 Sacred-Self: *It's brought me a lot more peace and promise.* ~ Terry

*People care, even if it is negative or positive. People do care if they talk about your name; at least somebody is talking about you. Now today I enjoy life, I enjoy coming to talk to you, to give time to explain what I learned. I learned lots about myself because I attended [Warriors], I spoke about me, about my past. Mistakes I made and how that helped me to not go back to my mistakes.*

*Instead, to carry on ... to educate myself.*

~ David (Former Member, February 18, 2011)

Our selves continually strive for wholism and whereby “full-mindedness’ [is] the union of mind and heart, of intellect and intuition” (Rheault, 2000, p. 5). The philosophy of the self is paramount to Indigenous peoples because we think and experience with our whole being (Archibald, 2008; Cole, 2003; Cajeté, 2000; Gill, 2003). To do otherwise is to experience discontent and disruption in our Medicine Wheel. To a friend I mention,

*I feel as though my Medicine Wheel has a flat tire.*

*In which realm?* he asks me.

*All, I admit. Physically, I'm losing mobility and gaining awkwardness, tiredness and pain. Spiritually, I'm facing efforts to be grateful for life and to honour myself with innovative ideas and adaptable practices. Emotionally and intellectually, I'm drained.* (Personal Communication, April 27, 2011)

Consequently, I need to adjust my spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual wellness in accordance with my evolving experiences and perceptions.

Another intimate Sacred-self is to understand the self as a part of a couple in the way that Patrick and Donna teach me. Not only do they seek to improve themselves as individuals but also as life-partners; and WAVS appears to be the accepting environment in which they can trust one another and circle members while doing so. Although I do not

intentionally set out to survey gender similarities and/or differences of healing perspectives, Patrick and Donna guide me towards this seemingly monumental task. Because they travel together to both our places of conversation, as Patrick's and my first visit wind down returns and Donna joins our discussion. Patrick begins with a significant point of reflection about WAVS in their lives,

*I think one of the biggest things for me is that I am learning to take responsibility, not just for myself but also as a couple. I do share that I was abusive to her – I was very, very abusive towards my partner. I don't only say that to me but I also validate...validate her, like I look at her and say, 'I was very abusive to my partner.' So when I look at her, I'm looking at her as a couple not just me as an individual but I also include her into the conversation; and I'm not hiding—I'm not hiding anything from the group. I'm very open. I'm doing everything I can to be as open as possible to be that responsible person. To be respectful because I don't want to continue these kinds of behaviors. And this is what the program is teaching me. This is what I believe Warriors is basically wanting to teach me. Not just about the program itself – it's not just about the lessons. But it's what I'm learning from the group. I want that [relational matter of being a couple] to be ingrained in me. (December 3, 2012)*

Patrick and Donna view the self as the relational other; the unification of a couple into one and portray a powerful, simultaneous understanding of Sacred-self-couplehood. Patrick explores a yearning to being a whole relational self as a couple. For Donna, *The [WAVS] focus is very much on preventing violence and preventing abuse and I sometimes wish it could focus a little more on what it's like to be with a partner of the abuser*. As the two take turns sharing considerations other participants do not, Patrick continues,

*A lot of the times when she says something, first thing she shared with me was, 'How did you appreciate me sharing that?' And I said, 'We came to a compromise that anything that was shared in there was meant to be shared'. We are an open book. So no matter what she shared about, whether it was abuse I'd done to her, she has that ability if she wants to. Really, that's hers to share. In order to me to learn how to conduct myself is to be a part of that*

*responsibility because it's out in the open now—I have nothing to hide. So I did something to her that caused her pain and this is a group that we come to as couples—we come there as people, partners. If my partner wants to share something I'm not obligated to say, 'No you can't share that.' It's up to her if she wants to share that. But she always asks me, 'Is it okay if I share it.' And I will tell her, 'You know what, it's okay for you to share it' because our relationship is learning to be like an open book. That's the way I want our relationship.* (December 3, 2012)

Living a relationship like an 'open book' is metaphorical on a number of levels such as respect, trust, responsibility, giving and sharing. Opening that 'book' seems to be the awakening that both Donna and Patrick practice along their dual paths of increasing wellness. Donna responds,

*One of the things that help us, too, is if I share there, I get validated by the group and Patrick learns that I'm not the only one who has those feelings. I'll say, 'You know, when this happened I felt this'. You know, sometimes other women will be like, 'Wow, that happened to me too and I felt the same way.' And I'm like, 'Ok, it's not just me, I'm not crazy. Other females react the same way.' I think maybe for the other women listening, when they hear me share about the affect the abuse had on me that sometime they'll think, 'Oh, okay, she's brave enough to talk about it, maybe I'll speak about it too.'* (December 3, 2012)

Group sharing also seems to have an impact on their level of responsibility to their self, their partner and any social others within their trusted circle of members at WAVS. Such notions may further stem from the facilitators themselves whose model of healing the self involves rejection of blame and the inner search for accountability and responsibility for one's life choices, whether single or in a relationship.

#### 4.2.2 East: *Why am I so violently angry?* ~ Gerry

##### Earth

*We have a traditional saying, which means if somebody, nobody, how they lived on this earth or what they'd done to you, once they've passed away you let all that stuff leave with them. That's where I am today. Releasing [my dad]. For my own self, I can't carry those things with me – I just can't. Because they're not mine.*

~ White Owl (Present Member, December 9, 2010)

Earth, known as Mother Earth by many Aboriginal peoples, is an element situated at the center of our existence. The earth, in its very nature, is at rest and at peace, absent of subjugation. It is important that we are “relating to, rather than mastering, nature and the environment” (Dei, 2000, p. 74).

*I've been thinking about the ways in which I touch with my spirit and nature. Despite the fact that UBC and a lot of urban living is composed of much concrete and hardness and almost a sense of tension, I wonder, 'Where does mother nature go to when you have a big metropolitan city surrounding you? How do I now handle this?' Number one I walk on grass whenever possible. My feet need a rest; my body needs a rest; my mind and my ancestral spirit needs a rest upon the softness of walking on grass. In Autumn, my favourite season, I refer to the sidewalks as a 'concrete sandwich'—Mother Earth beneath the cement and then topping the sidewalks are fallen, yet still vibrant leaves destined for home to cyclically nurture the earth. (Personal Field Note, October 8, 2009).*

Weston (1938) is concerned with our earthen nature in this way:

It seems so utterly naive that landscape – not that of the pictorial school – is not considered 'social significance' when it has a far more important bearing on the human race of a given locale than excrescences called cities. By landscape, I mean every physical aspect of a given region – whether soil, wildflowers, mountain peaks –

and its affect on the psyche and physical appearance of the people.  
My landscapes of the past year are years in advance of any I have  
done before of any I have seen. (p. 48)

Glen Aikenhead and Masakata Ogawa (2007) explain that land and Aboriginal peoples do not simply coexist; they are one in the same, just as White Owl and my conversation reveals. The participant explains his core being in relation to his identity and location, showing me his Aboriginal Status card<sup>7</sup> from his wallet:

*Well, it's kind of like my birthright.*

*I hear you saying your birth right in the sense of taking ownership and being proud.* (December 9, 2010)

White Owl answers me, the ever-curious researcher, with patience and further details of his Cree pride. He directs me to understand that his birthright, evidenced by his status card, reaffirms his connection to his people and their land, being so tied to the land heritage-wise that one does not leave it. Chief Dan George, a chief of the *Tsleil-Waututh* Nation, a Coast Salish band located on Burrard Inlet in North Vancouver, BC declares these words of love for this land.

How long have I known you, oh Canada? A hundred years? Yes, a hundred years. And many many seelanum more. And today, when you celebrate your hundred years, oh Canada, I am sad for all the Indian people throughout the land.

For I have known you when your forests were mine; when they gave

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<sup>7</sup> "An individual recognized by the federal government as being registered under the *Indian Act* is referred to as a Registered Indian (commonly referred to as a Status Indian). Status Indians are entitled to a wide range of programs and services offered by federal agencies and provincial governments. Over the years, there have been many rules for deciding who is eligible for registration as an Indian under the *Indian Act*. Important changes were made to the Act in June 1985, when Parliament passed Bill C-31, *An Act to Amend the Indian Act*, to bring it in line with the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and again in 2011 with the coming into force of Bill C-3: *Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act*" (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada).

me my meat and my clothing. I have known you in your streams and rivers where your fish flashed and danced in the sun, where the waters said come, come and eat of my abundance. I have known you in the freedom of your winds. And my spirit, like the winds, once roamed your good lands. (Canada's Centennial Celebration, Vancouver, 1967)

M. discusses the elements of land in a surprisingly different way. As a child, M. turned to taking out her anger and hurt in an unfamiliar way. At the age of ten, she returned home from residential school and became destructive. *For some strange reason, I liked breaking glass. I broke my mother's windows, I broke the jars, I broke the dishes. I just wanted to break everything* (March 3, 2011). The most common kind of glass, in windows, serving dishes and drinking ware, is composed of about 75% silica and several minor additives. Silica, a form of silicon, one of the most common elements on earth is found in rocks and stones within the earth's crust (Silica Minerals, 2012). When I ask if she had any ideas about being drawn to glass, she wittily puts that one back on the researcher's shoulders with an off-the-cuff, *I have no idea—you tell me*. After a pause, however, she adds that she and her mom *talked about it years later. I couldn't figure out why I wanted to break glass*. The question M. poses to me is rhetorical, of course and nothing I can offer could be as personally conjectured as her final surmise: *Maybe it was an alternative to wanting to break myself* (March 3, 2011).

## Spiritual

*Being a First Nations person, we're a very spiritual people. We are all interconnected, with our lives, with our world, with our environment.*

~ Terry (Present Member, March 16, 2011)

For many Indigenous peoples, my/our spirituality may involve prayer, meditation, smudging, sweatlodges, Elders' wisdom, drumming, song, dance, a connection to the land and tradition (Waldram, 1994; Martel and Brassard, 2008). Case in point, Patrick is inspired or in-spirited, by Dan and Joe as Elder-role models at WAVS and recognizes their transformative powers of Indigenous spirituality and adaptability in the ways they change negative behaviours into renewed, positive ones.

*I learned ... one thing that I'm learning is how Dan used to pray. How he used to express himself. He spoke from his heart. He was able to transform his energy into somebody else. He'd pray for all the directions. Joe prays for people who are on the street, he prays for people that are in the spirit world. He doesn't forget and if he forgets he says, 'If I've forgotten anything, forgive me.'* (February 16, 2010)

Donna also confirms,

*One of the things that's unique for the Warriors that's totally lacking in these White, Caucasian therapy programs is that we have spirituality and ritual and I think that's crucial to why that program is so powerful. Patrick and I make a point to incorporate ritual into our daily lives ... [they] are like a skeleton for the day ... They're comforting.* (December 3, 2010)

Comforting and welcoming, she reminds me of the first WAVS group night I attend, cleanse with burning sage and sweetgrass and pray together with other WAVS members, as mentioned earlier in chapter 1. Although Joyce takes care of new members letting them know smudging, and/or any other Indigenous rite of participation is voluntary, I, am no different than most new members in WAVS' Monday evening circles who seek to embrace spirituality.

Meaningful rituals, even amongst strangers at first, involve a certain level of trust and acceptance when getting to know one another and ourselves. In Aboriginal culture, the sharing circle, the feather and the respect of taking turns to speak and to fully listen are new to some people and traditional for others, depending on age and circumstances. For those encountering them for the first time, it is necessary to present these healing tools as culturally-relevant—more than anger management—tools that reinforce our collective understanding of Indigenous worldviews and our ancestral/spiritual connectedness to one another and our past, present and future.

An example of a healing tool that speaks to this connectedness comes from WAVS youth leader, Ryan, who demonstrated his martial arts skills at WAVS event. Throughout his demonstration, he respectfully acknowledges the safety rules of the 'time out' strategy of



*avoiding all physical labor like chopping wood, boxing bags or seemingly harmless gun target practice in a field. These are all aggressive actions and build up aggression and heightened emotions, as I wrote about in chapter 2.*

*Ryan windedly explains, as he kicks and punches the very air we breath, he prayerfully dedicates each and every one of his rhythmic moves, punches and kicks, to a person about whom he thinks (not of attacking that person but of honouring him or her with that particular martial arts move). He says of these artistic, calculated moves, 'They help me to commit to my dedication to help my community.' Furthermore, he described martial arts as a way he prays and gives gratitude to the Creator. (Group Meeting Field Note, April 29, 2010)*

Nearly one year later, I ask Ryan about spirituality among the youth. He explains, *I'm seeing that they're happy about it. They're intrigued, this is something new to them. Like the smudging for example, they're asking, like what is this for, I like the smell of it, the cleansing aspect of it* (March 18, 2011). Within WAVS, spirituality is inextricably tied to healing. However, as Joe, facilitator, reminds group members, he is not here to make 'born-again Indians' out of us. He encourages that while people are of different faiths and spirituality, the WAVS philosophy rests on the symbolic Medicine Wheel because of its wholistic balance and harmonious ways of being, regardless our ethnicity. Likewise, Melanie demonstrates with her children that healing/protection rituals such as smudging/cleansing can have a revitalizing effect:

*They call it cleaning up. 'Oh, you've got to clean up now. We've got to wash ourselves off now.' That's what they say because I smudge with them now. And they get excited when we do it. It's nice to see the joy in their faces when they're doing it, that they know how to do it. (March 10, 2011)*

Spiritual re/awakening and re/connection for this family comes in the form of WAVS traditional Intervention model, cultural reverence and cleansing. I think of another child-warrior from my Group Meeting Field Notes:

*Someone catches my heart tonight is that of a mom bringing her 3-year-old son to group night for opening prayers. He later goes downstairs to daycare. But it's really quite sweet: he's 3-years old and when we all stand to smudge and pray this young fellow also smudges. In this instance, it is sage burning in an abalone shell and then the smoke is being feathered by the man as he goes around to each person in the circle. This little guy takes his turn, too and he puts his little fingers into the smoke and pulls it in towards his head and his heart and his face and it's really something to watch him do this. Almost a message that thank goodness, tradition is not lost. (October 18, 2010)*

Such demonstrations of reverence suggest that programs that involve spirituality can assist in rejuvenating the soul as a part of healing. Spiritual grounding can provide a formidable healing foundation on a day-to-day basis of coping with intergenerational trauma. Melanie tells me,

*I think Warriors and the church [I attend] together helped me to remember my ancient roots and keep it really close to my heart and it's really important that I remember where I'm from even though I'm [living] way the hell in Vancouver and my reserve is all the way outside of Vancouver. (March 10, 2011)*

The notion of Indigenous peoples being connected to all parts/forms of life in spirit and with inter-relational energy of one's common culture is the synergy about which both parents and children of WAVS speak.

### **Children**

*I love kids, I love dogs and I love cats. I love animals. They give me a sense of joy. Because they don't bring into this world anger or resentment or anything like that. They just are. So they give me a sense of joy. Little kids are like that because they haven't gotten to that place of, uh, knowing how to give resentment or get people angry. They're just human beings.*

~ Patrick (Present Member, December 8, 2010)

In the above epigraph, Patrick links his present life with children and animals. I ask him,

*How do you celebrate yourself? You just said, 'I'm not a weak person, I'm a survivor.' Can you tell me more?*

*A lot of what we carry is mirrored. I find a lot of what other people are doing hurts me. It's just like, if somebody is being angry at a child, I feel a sense of anger because that was done to me as a kid. (February 14, 2011)*

In Patrick, there seems an awareness of the importance of children; they re/present some of the love, affection and belonging that he never had and continues to long for. He also demonstrates what might happen to an adult's life when the source of one's self-beginning toward awakening is disrupted. An awakening of the present self in past childhood years can mean psychological confusion. For instance, Patrick has the wisdom to recognize that in some ways, he is developmentally immature. *The residential school ruined my inhibitions [inclinations] to be a child; it ruined my inhibitions to be an adult. I don't know whether I'm a child or an adult now. I'm learning to grow; I'm learning to grow-up, to mature more* (February 16, 2011).

Gail's growing up experiences include transforming a children's game of hide-and-seek into a child's coping mechanism of survival. She recalls the violence being inescapable.

*There was always violence. That was the norm, you know. But I knew it wasn't normal, even though it was always like that. Because if I thought it was normal I wouldn't have had the fear, I don't think. I had such fear. I was always scared. I learned at a young age how to protect myself and how to hide—I looked for things to try and cover up my body the most. (December 9, 2010)*

The necessity of learning, of knowing, the safest locations for hiding from violence, can be paramount for a child witnessing violence. As with most people, survival is innate. I ask Gail,

*You'd go into hiding before somebody would spot you—what or who sent this little girl into hiding?*

*Well, nobody—I just knew. (December 9, 2010)*

From Gail's past, fear exposes the abnormality of violence. Yet the need for agencies such as WAVS reflects that not everyone, least of all a child, 'just knows' how to protect themselves.

Melanie reflects on her parenting interactions with her children and how she engages with them. I ask her to share about each of her five children. She is most clear about one salient matter—how much WAVS has helped her entire family.

*Warriors helps me get close to [my 2-year old son] not having that closeness with my mom because my mom was really distant with us ... My five year-old daughter ... I find myself being a better mother to her, just understanding what girls' needs are ... Warriors helps me to stick by my five year-old daughter more, allowing her to be a little girl, make a mistake, things I would typically get a spanking for. Then there's my six year-old son ... Warriors helps me to help keep him my little man because it is always constant for me to, you know, teaching him manners and um, for him to listen and know what respect is for women. My eight year old son, I think Warriors helps me to break my silence and my denial that I held for a long time—because of the fact that I while I was carrying my eight year old son I used alcohol, so there was a great risk of him being FASD. With my 12 year-old daughter, Warriors teaches me to listen to her, to ask more questions when I feel puzzled about things ... I was pretty shut down. I didn't know how to open up my mind and really take it seriously that she is my life and I gotta listen to her. That's how we communicate—just having a healthy communication. (March 10, 2011)*

This single-parented family shows the breaking of an old cycle, although not easy, can mean new, positive and healthy realities.

*It was overwhelming at first but it was almost like being able to listen to the little girl in me; something I never had with my mom, being able to say those kinds of things to her without her getting angry or throwing things at me or dragging me around by my hair—to have an open mind and how I need to do that with my kids, with my everyday life as well. (March 10, 2011)*

Like Melanie, David too focuses on family:

*I pass [WAVS teachings] on to my grandsons ... And I'm real proud of my girls, how they do with my grandchildren ... they keep them in school, educate them. They're always happy to see me. 'There's my grandpa.' [they say] and it's a good feeling. When I used to use, I used to go home. I used coke or heroine or drugs, different pills. The kids would look at me and they would take off, leave. They didn't want to be a part of me. And now today they want to talk, they want to be around me. (February 28, 2011)*

Patsy discusses her negative childhood familial dynamics and lack of parental necessities.

*My grandmother was really a busy woman and she left us in the care of our Aunties and our Aunties were younger women and they were setting off on their own and partying and stuff. Sometimes they would leave us, like, neglect us for days on end. Then stuff happened to me and my sisters and brothers because child sexual abuse is a crime of convenience. An adult came along and you leave a kid unattended—it was an awful environment—it was a really awful environment. (December 17, 2010)*

Where such open neglect of children may be surprising, especially in the face of so many adults/family members, often childrearing responsibilities were abandoned and placed upon youth themselves. It's as if the children were a work-task that everyone conveniently thought was someone else's responsibility. *We were raised with indifference*, Patsy concludes. Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern (1991) argue that long before modern science, First Nations peoples of North America used sophisticated, child development strategies designed to nurture caring, respectful and courageous children who were raised by parents who had gender distinct, yet mutually significant roles in supporting their children and others. The authors voice that strong communities were created, which, at the core, included Elders. Presently, as keepers of traditional, ancestral knowledge, Indigenous Elders are privileged transmitters of deeply held norms, values, beliefs and attitudes. Their guidance continues to result in effective child rearing practices in which underlying value systems support the processes of positive youth development. Families and communities that foster positive child development are necessary to carry on these traditions that have existed since

time immemorial. Grand National Chief Shawn Atleo reminds us, 'Failing to invest in our young population will result in dramatically increased social costs as well as, of course as I said, lost potential... We cannot have another generation lost' (Guest Speaker, Vancouver Board of Trade, April 7, 2011).

Indeed, it is not surprising that for Aboriginal families, wholistic health and wellness is not viewed and measured individually but by the integrity of the whole family—and more broadly—their communities (Archibald, 2008; Armstrong, 2000; Brokenleg and Van Bockern, 2003). However, with family men too often incarcerated, the integrity and therefore, health and wellness of the family is compromised. Women are left more susceptible to oppressive forces that exasperate the conditions for state apprehension of children and incarceration of youth. Through these experiences, Aboriginal children may then feel like they do not belong and may become angry, guarded, withdrawn and face health issues that may lead to perpetual stress and states of loss, for their lives are out of balance (Brokenleg and Van Bockern, 2003, p. 25). Joe offers this familial example at a WAVS group night:

*Tonight Joe shares a story about how his two sons were scorned at school and did not fully understand why and as they grew up, did not always make the best decisions [based on those negative experiences]. He tells of a time when his sons had 'International Day' at school. The boys' choices were, did they want to dress Italian like their grandfather or Indigenous like Joe [of Italian, Hawaiian, Seachelt Nation heritage]. The boys chose to wear Indigenous regalia but when they got to school, classmates, even their friends turned on them because that was the 'cool thing to do', to shun the Indian boys. So the boys came back from school very, very hurt and disappointed and feeling like they didn't fit in. (Group Meeting Field Note, March 21, 2011)*

Madeline Dion Stout, on the "Aboriginal Healing Foundation and The Legacy of Hope Foundation" website (2012), reminds us (as mentioned earlier in this paper) that poverty includes so much more than a lack of money, food, clothing and shelter. Poverty, for many Indigenous peoples, also includes loss of culture, familial love, traditions, languages, safety, identity, belonging, generational relationships (i.e. cultural teachings passed on) and spiritual connectedness with nature. Clearly, the Fossella boys were racialized into cultural poverty.

#### 4.2.3 South: *It's all about survival.* ~ Michael

##### Fire

*[If] you were to walk downtown Vancouver and stop people on the street and ask them, 'What are First Nations People?' Ninety percent would say, 'I don't know.' They'd say, 'Oh, there is Native art, there's Totem poles, there's this and that.' They have no idea who we are or what we've been through because it's being hidden from the public ... But there will always be that paranoid fear.*

~ Gerry (Present Member, February 14, 2011)

This section of severe passion and tension is devoted solely to participants' passionate stories about three cornerstone themes: racism, residential schooling and Incarceration. I awake this morning with diverging thoughts about my writing style that situates myself, as researcher, embedded with participants in our spiritually-connective narratives. *Why question myself now? And if So what manner of storywork might best suite the Southern sub-dimensions of emotion and fire?* Participants' stories are rich beyond comprehension, regardless of how I might narrate them. Indeed, such personal considerations about racism, systemic, illogical education and correctional institutionalization do not need my explicit definitions, voice or commentary. By stepping aside, I strive to spotlight the multiple compelling stories about which participants graciously teach—and patiently await—my learnings. Buffy Sainte Marie, musician and Aboriginal education activist, has simply stated, 'Know when to get out of the way' (Guest Speaker, UBC, March 5, 2012). It is the right time for these stories of fury to be spoken for themselves, through the participants' individual and collective hearts as ones of tension, friction, emotional agony and personal truths. They are colliding thoughts about the past, present and future lingerings and negative legacies of the Western education system of residential schools. The colonial, residential and/or day-school 'education' system was designed 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" as Duncan Campbell Scott, an early 20th century senior official with Indian Affairs, infamously declares (Aboriginal Healing Foundation and The Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2012). Now we hear what participants have to say about such life-defining experiences.

## **Racism**

### **Patrick**

*I try and pay attention to how I conduct myself. I can't go around disrespecting people or dishonouring people just because I have a lot of anger or a lot of rage. I still have to learn how to be a better human being. There's a lot of things that I don't like in communities or in society that I find are contradicting. I'm not perfect, I still have a sort of sickness in my mind. I don't know how to live life on life's terms yet. One of the biggest things that I have to learn is how to respect women and children. Come back to those sorts of teachings in order for me to live, to live amongst others in a good way. And respect all races because I find that I have a racist mind and a racist ear. I say Chinese and Chink and Japanese and Hindus; I still have those sayings, I picked it up somewhere; it's a form of violence that I don't appreciate. It's about our perception. Because it was done to me [racism], I didn't appreciate it. I don't think that these brothers and sisters appreciate it, you know. (February 16, 2011)*

### **Michael**

*I'll share this story, one of the most embarrassing or low points for me. My father wasn't in our life a whole lot. He came to the hockey rink when I was playing hockey and he looks like he just walked off the res, right, so I was so embarrassed because the kids would go, 'Oh he's your father, I didn't know you were an Indian.' And then the name [-calling started]. I was so angry and embarrassed that he was my father. (December 9, 2010)*

### **Patsy**

*The residential school that we went to, it was really close by to our home, so we were bused there and taken back home, so we were day students at a residential school. And the kids and the staff hated us. The kids who had to stay there hated us because we got to go home. And the staff hated us because, I mean, why do you become a teacher when you hate kids? So we got it from the staff and we got it from the kids and so it was like a double whammy. It was really, really hard to go there. Then me and my brother and my two younger sisters went to go live with my mom and then it was the public school.*



*[At] the public school, I remember once playing outside and this little White boy, this racist guy and he's like, 'Indian' and I'm like, 'Indian, so what? I'm an Indian.' But it was the way he said it. It was the first time I encountered racism. I remember even when we were going there, the principal called all the Native students in and was lecturing us [about how] we shouldn't call the White kids 'White' because look at us, we're not even White we're 'pink'. Like, calling us on what we were saying [and not them]. (December 17, 2010)*

#### **M.**

*All the Natives that are in that office [her place of employment] are given the lowest jobs. And all the ones that are not Native, she [my boss] acts as if they're just so special. Like, they're so smart and they're so educated and they're so capable. She just acts as if she can barely tolerate us. I have a really good relationship with my co-workers to the extent where they give respect to me and I give respect to them. My boss seems to think that that's not right because she says now they think that I'm the boss ... When they showed me their respect she wouldn't let us talk to each other. She isolated me. But they kept talking to me because they wanted to ask me questions like, 'How do you recommend we do this, how do you recommend that?' I'm not going to say, 'Oh, no, I can't answer you because the boss said no.' What can I tell them? She kept trying to say that I was disrupting the workplace; I was interfering with their work. Meanwhile all I was doing was helping them and they're the ones who came to me. So I was like, 'If you have any problems with that go tell them to stop talking to me.' (March 3, 2011)*

### **Residential Schooling**

#### **Gerry**

*We've been here since the beginning of time and there's a lot of alcoholism, drug abuse on the reserve. A lot of residential school survivors, a lot of people affected by assimilation. Residential school settlements given every now and then, doesn't do anything but contribute to their extinction by giving them drug money or alcohol money to drink themselves to death rather than putting it into trauma counselling programs and getting educated in self-help or counselling to come in one-on-one because there's so much paranoia that most First Nations people believe that White*

*people are going to exterminate them again. It shouldn't even be an issue or a fact because if White people truly care about what they did with the Indians, they wouldn't be handing them residential school settlements or money as a way of saying, 'Oh, I'm sorry for what I did.' Because most of that ends up in drugs or alcohol or suicide. To me, giving Indians settlements is just another way of killing them. Exterminating them like cockroaches. So to me, it isn't sincere help at all. All that money should go to trauma counseling. (December 6, 2010)*

### **Patrick**

*Five. Age five I was routed there. I believe that they did come and pick me up in some...some wagon or something. RCMP or someone or the Department of Human Affairs or something like that came and picked me up and brought me to the Residential school. It was a long way. But I thought I was just going for a ride. I didn't know I was going to a Residential school.*

*I remember that the first day that I got to WAVS; I felt at home right away because here they were talking in a circle and when it got to me I let out a little bit of tears, stating, 'I'm a survivor of Residential school and I have a lot of anger issues and I don't know how to have a relationship. I don't understand how to have a perfect relationship.' Whether it's because I carry a lot of anger; I was lacking in the way to conduct myself through the trauma that I was going through. I was going through different kinds of trauma and I had to deal with Residential school. Abuse that happened to me, I was raped. I was molested. I had incest happen. I was beaten up as a kid. I got strapped as a kid ... I was there for five years. It felt like a lifetime.*

*In order to better our lives we need to take care of that garbage, all the bad stuff that's within us, you know. It's...I believe it's because of the residential school system—a lot of people who went through it are still affected and I think that will happen even 100 years from now because it's a cycle. And as a whole Nation we should deal with it [healing all together], it's not reality. We need to heal individually [also] because of the things we do in Warriors Against Violence, the things we talk about there. Because a lot of these things were, there're learned behaviours, like anger and violence and family violence, like sexual abuse and all kinds of abuse, you*

*know. In order for us to overcome these issues, we need to heal with them [fellow First Nations peoples] in groups like Warriors Against Violence (December 9, 2010)*

### **Terry**

*As Aboriginal people, we do know where it stems from, the anger but because is such a heavy topic and controversial, it's hard to speak of because everything stems, in my opinion, from residential school. (March 16, 2011)*

### **David**

*I did ten years there. I was 5-years old. I was taken to a foster home, then to a boy's school and then to prisons. Usually, I just fought with the RCMP. I fought with the other men; hurt them pretty bad so I went to prison. It's this residential school. When I was 5, they started using me as a pawn to fight the other boys, to discipline them, the next thing they're training me to box in the residential school. (February 28, 2011)*

### **Patsy**

*Basically, before I went to residential school I was raised in a loving environment with my grandparents. My grandmother and my grandfather showed me a lot of love and affection. They were raising me in the culture, they were probably speaking the language. So I went from that loving environment to a residential school that was trying to take our culture. That's what their mandate was. Take the child away from the family so you take any cultural history. The residential school that we went to was really close by to our home, so we were bussed there and taken back home, we were day-students. And the kids and the staff hated us. The kids who had to stay there hated us because we got to go home. And the staff hated us because, I mean, why do you become a teacher when you hate kids? So we got it from the staff and we got it from the kids and so it was like a double whammy. It was really, really hard to go there.*

*It's funny that when we were going to the residential school we were getting bussed past a public school and I'm just thinking it's really stupid. Shouldn't you be going to the closer school? So there was a public school and then the residential school. But I think the people who ran the public school told my grandmother that you have to*

*send them there. And then the public school didn't want us there. [But] when the residential school closed down, the public school was forced to take us in.*

*My mother-in-law went to Kamloops residential school and there were horror stories she told us. All these horror stories were hard, listening to an Elder tell us what happened to her. I mean, anything horrific like that didn't happen to me. I mean, there's one positive thing we had out of the residential school. We had that lunch – one square meal a day. Because at home there was hardly anything there. So yeah, there was one positive that came out of it, was that we had a hot lunch. We [also] got to go home every day. I think just the way they are, they instilled in us that knowledge is power, just by the fact going to residential school. I'm always taking anything Western with a grain of salt because I'm First Nations first and foremost and my grandmother and grandfather taught me some of their language because that's why I have an accent; when I went to residential school they took that out of me. They indoctrinated the English language. (December 7, 2010)*

**M.**

*Well, what happened was, I was raised by my grandparents. My grandfather never had any good experiences with White people because they were always ripping him off, paid him with cases of wine instead of money and he didn't even drink, and um, so he didn't like that. He thought that was very disrespectful, so he didn't want to send me to school because he had some bad experiences in his business dealings, so he tried to keep me out of school as long as possible. The way that he did that was he moved us away from the main part of the community, way out into the bush. We had a cabin out there and he hid us, me and my brother and they eventually found out and they said, 'If you don't send them to school, we will take them away.' So he had no choice but to move back to the community and we started to go to the day school, which is really weird the way we were isolated.*

*There was a lot of violence in my life. It started when I was in residential school, I went there when I was 9-years old. Before that I can say that I had a pretty idyllic life. I was spoiled, I was treasured, I was raised by my grandparents in the traditional way. By the time I was in grade, um, I'd just passed into grade 3, my mother was approached by Indian affairs and um, they were basically having a hard time*

*because my grandfather died when I was 7 and he was basically the backbone of the family, so once he died everything fell apart. At that time my mother didn't have a husband, so she hated seeing us doing without, she always wanted us to have nice clothes and good food and good education and everything. All these dreams, as any mother would, eh?*

*So, Indian Affairs approached us, they must have found out that that's what she wanted, so they said, 'If you send them to the school, they will have beautiful clothes, they will have the best food and they will have the best education and you won't have to worry about them.' So she agreed. But she didn't realize how awful it would be. They sent us to residential school. That's when they sent us to residential school, that's why they told her these things because they knew that's what she wanted to hear.*

*I got my first beating fifteen minutes after I walked into that school because my brother screamed and cried when they took him over to the boys' side. He didn't know why they were taking him away from me and I didn't know why, so I tried to run and get him to comfort him and they right away said, 'You are an evil person because you want to be with the boys.' And they beat me up for that and I fought with them and everything because it was my job to look after my younger brother and they weren't letting me do that. He was crying. So from that point on, they say you either fight or take flight. I'm a fighter, so from that point on my task was already picked out. If I'm going to be a fighter, I'm going to be beaten a lot. So I spent my whole time there fighting and getting beaten.*

*That year [at residential school] was enough to isolate me from the community. Once you leave the community, you have to earn your place again—you're an outsider. You have this weird haircut: straight across. You look different, you act different; I was violent then, they didn't understand why I was violent. I was destructive. For some strange reason, I liked breaking glass. I broke my mother's windows, I broke the jars, I broke the dishes. I just wanted to break everything. So that was one of the reasons why the community thought, 'She's weird, you know, she doesn't belong here.' I didn't feel like I belonged there.*

*I got mad real easy. My mother couldn't deal with me. She finally got to the point when she was just terrified for me. And I fought. I fought, fought, fought. Finally, I ended up in foster care. That was terrible because I ran into a lot of racism. I was treated like a maid. Or, people would try to sexually abuse me. So I went back to residential school again when I was 13. I didn't know where else to go. I couldn't fit in with the community anymore. I was already destroyed. A lot of people say they've been there for 12 years, 15 years – it doesn't matter. You don't need to be there for that long. I was there for 15 minutes and I was destroyed forever. I will never, ever – that attitude will never be healed ... I feel that all a person has to do is spend 15 minutes in that place and you're wrecked for life. That's all I spent, I became wrecked 15 minutes after I got there.*

*And you know what made it worse, many years later? My brother changed when he went there and I didn't know why. But just recently, I found out that the first night that he was there he was sexually abused. He never complained about anything. We never had a clue. Well, we didn't even know he needed it [counselling]. It was just that one thing that proved he needed it, when he committed suicide ... I was lucky [to have been there for my mom] because she lost him. She was catatonic. That was the first child that she ever lost ... All his life before that he was a happy-go-lucky guy ... And I had a 17-year-old sister that shot herself to death and an 8-year-old sister that drowned.*

*The one who committed suicide, she would be—let's see—she was 15 years younger than me. Oh, she was given up for adoption, too ... All my brothers and sisters that were given up for adoption, that was a traumatic experience for them. They felt abandoned, they felt given away, they couldn't understand why them and not us. I keep telling them, 'You're lucky. You're lucky.' You got raised in a safe way. The rest of us had to go through hell. At least you were in your own family. I can understand how they feel because if I was put up for adoption, I think I'd feel the same way. But, at the same time, I know what we had to live through.*

*She was staying with me but she went to visit my other sister and that's where she did herself in. She didn't want to be by herself when she did it, so she waited until my sister came home and then she did it. Right in front of her. Right in front of her. She*

*said that her heart landed over there on the step. What happened was a cousin of ours, that's her best friend, had killed himself a month earlier. He shot himself, too. She couldn't stand him being gone because they were so close. So she was trying to deal with that. And then on top of that I learned later on that she may have been sexually abused at the place that she had been adopted [into] because she had all these cut marks on her arms. Yeah, she cut up her arms and I couldn't figure out why she did that and I talked to a counsellor once and he said she may have been sexually abused as a child. Because she came back to our family when she was 14, and um, I didn't know that [of her possible abuse], so that's probably why she was really messed up. (March 3, 2011)*

### ***Incarceration***

#### **White Owl**

*Inside prison, it's pretty violent. A lot of people say, the ones who've been to residential schools, a penitentiary is just a bigger version of a residential school because you have everything in there. You have stabbings, you have beatings, you have murders. (December 9, 2010)*

#### **David**

*[How long did you spend in prison?] All my life. Right from residential school into prison. I come out and I met my woman, I stayed out maybe six months ... I had an addiction, like drinking, drugging and I had no feelings. I didn't know what feelings were all about ... Because we're told what to do, what to eat, how to speak, how to act, you have to watch out what you say, what you do. I was there ... my first time I was there for a short time but once I got out I was in trouble right away. This time, it's the longest I've been out four years.*

*I'm still doing time today [on parole]. I've got two years [to go] ... I'm doing ten years for manslaughter and that is my own blood ... my blood brother. And I have to make changes. I'm getting too old for this. Running around, going to different prisons ... My mom's sister's husband; he's the one who started me fighting the other boys. I was taken to a foster home, then to a boy's school and then to prisons.*

*I was fifteen-years old when I went to correctional school. They sent me when I beat up staff there ... threw a chair and they couldn't handle me, so they sent me straight to prison. I was there ... my first time I was there for a short time but once I got out I was in trouble right away. It was like I'd been out maybe a month. One time I was out only a day. I started drinking and I beat up my partner in drunk jealousy. I woke up in prison and then I got another year for hitting her, assault, it's a thing, like there's no ending ... They taught us in there, that's why lots of us never lived long and we still drink and drugs because we don't like who we are. Because we're forced to look down on ourselves, never to look at the beauty of the world. (December 7, 2010)*

### **Leslie**

*I did not have very much control over my life ... my life was very much controlled by the system. I was a product of the system, I did end up in foster care, I did use detention centers, I ended up in a variety of situations where my freedom was ... that's what I would see as having no control. When I had made the decision that I was going to do some healing on this journey and turn my life around because I knew even then I had a lot to contribute to our society, to our communities. ... In prison, I've seen a lot of people that would never make it out of prison. There were a lot of people that died there. There were a lot of people that ended up getting life in prison. There were a lot of people that ended up, sort of disappearing into the bowels of the system. It happens. It happens in Canada. It happens all around the world.*

*I had an enormous fear of dying in prison and I knew I had to turn my life around. But I also knew I had the intellect in order to do that. I firmly believe that education is one of the key cornerstones to making wiser decisions in your life. So while I was serving time in prison, I had gone to school. I had always tried to better myself. I came out of prison in 1991. I had two years of university, a ticket as a carpenter, millwright, cabinet-maker and ... I'm also a camera technician and a paste-up layout artist. ... So when I did get out of prison I first of all went into the construction industry to make a living.*

*I was no different than anybody else. Except for the fact, perhaps that I had continually tried to gear [myself] towards education. I read lots, I probably read, uh, I don't know, in the hundreds of books while I was in prison. ... I had the opportunity*



*because there was a tremendous amount of isolation time that I had served. ... I did have some very positive role models ... and some of them, some of those men were in prison.*

*At the age of 16 ... when I first went to jail, one of the very first things they did, the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia came up to me and recruited me to be the secretary and eventually I became the President of the Native Brotherhood in a number of different institutions where there were Brotherhood organizations. That was in 1969. There were not a lot of well-educated First Nations people in prison at the time and I had a grade 10, which means that I was well educated. ... And it wasn't the grade 10 that you would get out of going to a residential school because a lot of guys had that. But, basically, a residential school didn't teach them any sort of academics. So I went to public school, so I was very well versed in English, Math and Reading. ... So I was constantly sought after as a political activist in the prison. And we literally, I was taught a lot of different skills where we would take advantage of the system because we were caught up in the system. (December 1, 2010)*

In the above passages about systemic racism, residential schooling and Correctional Services Canada (CSC), I seek to unite not only with Gerry, Patrick, Terry, David, Patsy, M. and Leslie but also with my readers; I too, become the literate *listener*, a key component on which effective understanding rests. It is said that while someone is speaking, if you are already silently formulating your response, whether it be a comment, suggestion or question—the bottom line is—you are not listening, as the above stories of fiery deservedly command.

Yet, I would feel remiss in not highlighting some of the basic physiological, physical and social factors over which imprisoned men are advantaged. *Incarcerated-at-home* partners, mostly women, are more susceptible to emotional anguish and implicit oppression in the form of social isolation (Lester-Smith and Wanyanya, 2012, m.s.), as Donna explains:

*I continued to go to that program always when [my partner] went using [drugs]. I continued to go on my own. However, when he got those charges... to be honest with you... I didn't go. Because I felt really [emotionally] bruised, embarrassed and ashamed and I felt mortified and I thought people would never understand how I could continue to be with him*

*in view of what had happened. I'm sure that would not have been the case. I'm sure there would not have been judgment but I put that on myself that there would be. So it wasn't until [my partner] got out of jail that we returned to Warriors [WAVS], so I actually missed about a year and a half to two years of Warriors. In retrospect I probably should have continued going but I just...[voice trails off]. (December 1, 2010)*

In all likelihood, were she a First Nations mother with children, Donna would have suffered even beyond debilitating shame. Incarcerated family men have no fiscal responsibilities like food, shelter and utility bills and at times are conveniently afforded camaraderie and safety. In fact, supportive friendships apparently exist, as one group member suggests. When he reoffended and was sent back to prison, he later explained that as he walked in, a number of inmates said, 'Hey Buddy, welcome back, welcome home, good to see you!' (Group Meeting Field Note, March 15, 2010). Additionally, many Aboriginal men seek unified support in the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia (NBBC), established in 1931, which continues to

advance the social, spiritual, economic and physical conditions of its members, including higher standards of education, health and living conditions and to cooperate with recognized organizations and Government departments which concern themselves with the advancement of Indian welfare. (NBBC, 2011)

White Owl describes NBBC in this way:

*The Brotherhood is what it is, just a brotherhood of Natives meeting together and doing stuff. Some of them try to better themselves, some are still stuck in that lifestyle, you know. For some its just protection, you know, especially the prairies. (December 9, 2010)*

Beyond communal support, more fiscal concerns are documented. For instance, the cost of incarcerating a single Federal male prisoner in 2004/5 was \$87,665 per prisoner/per year, which significantly exceeded the 2005 median income of peoples with Aboriginal ancestry at the highest educational levels (certificate, diploma or degree), which was \$26, 293 (Statistics

Canada (b)). This suggests that for Aboriginal families, a single incarcerated male would account for almost four median Aboriginal incomes.

## Emotion

*No matter what has happened to you in life, the stuff that changed you as a child, they weren't yours. The shame, the guilt, the hatred—these things were put on me; I took on someone's garbage. And for myself, too, it almost destroyed me.*

~ White Owl (Present Member, December 9, 2010)

In his Emotional Active Wellness Journal (2009), Lee Brown explains the power of affective communication: “As you achieve greater emotional competency and take responsibility for your emotions, your relationships with others will move to a higher level of maturity” (p. 23). Emotions can not only be about love, respect, joy, care and laughter, they can also be about hurt, anger, fear, shame, denial and worthlessness. WAVS describes and teaches members “Emotional cues [to become aware of in order to change one’s own violent behaviours] are the feelings that *typically* take place prior to an abusive or violent incident ... as the body begins to prepare for violence” (WAVS Manual, 2003, Italics in original, p. 21).

By recognizing individual red flag words involved in heated verbal exchanges; physical cues like racing heart rate, pounding chest, clenching fists, rapid breathing, callous staring, tensing muscles or clenching jaws; and emotional cues of feeling belittled, ashamed, guilty, challenged, frightened or silenced, WAVS members learn to take a step back from their escalating anger and employ a ‘time-out’ before they injure themselves and/or anyone else. Although these lists can be endless as a pacific coast beach, with encouragement, members begin to recognize and share aloud (at home or in Warriors group sessions) precursors to violent outbursts. Patsy shares,

*My first instinct was to slug her out but something was shouting in my head, ‘No, you’ve got to remove yourself from the situation, even though she’s in your space.’ I said, ‘Ok I’m going to go and see the supervisor.’ And I just backed away and I just left. Otherwise I would have been charged with assault. (December 17, 2010)*

To David I ask, *Do we ever really heal?*

*I just live for the day. Like today, talking to you. Right now I'm happy. And I'd like to stay like that the rest of the day. But we all have hard days. That'll eventually come but I can handle it ... like the time-out and what I learned in WAVS. And it's a good thing to understand life like that he laughs. (February 28, 2011)*

This foundational educational component is what WAVS refers to as the “Control Plan,” whereby members slowly learn to identify their individual “trigger points that precede an abusive incident and endeavour to remove themselves from the situation” (WAVS Manual, 2003, p. 20). Numerous participants, while learning the Control Plan, historically situate themselves as having experienced spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual trauma in their earlier years. Gerry succinctly defines such historically critical considerations:

*It depends on what each individual child's experiences. It could be just sexual abuse. It could be physical abuse—you know—beatings, tortures. It could be both. It could be witnessing violence, too, which could have a big effect on a lot of children. There's just so many different varieties of abuse. (December 6, 2010)*

Freda educates me about more of the relational, emotional complexities of violence by storytelling about how long she hesitated to seek healing assistance from WAVS because a member in attendance had abused her in the past.

*So therefore, I had a hard time being there and I hadn't dealt with [that situation], even though it was years and years and years ago. That's what kept me out of that circle and so finally I decided to face this music and deal with that problem and that's what I did. (December 6, 2010)*

Since, she has been able to cope better in the presence of the individual who hurt her and also repair close family ties with another circle member. Confidentiality builds trust and understanding. It is a core step where Warriors are not judgmental of who joins the group.

Members begin to feel they are not alone in the weekly sharing groups. Also, this trust needs to be set because communities are smaller than some think and names and situations can be easily figured out. But confidentiality also has its boundaries... for anyone disclosing about hurting themselves or another person, facilitators carry a legal responsibility to pass this information to police. These limitations of confidentiality are shared with new members.

Patrick knows about obstacles well; one such barrier for him has been prison. His lawyer counted up the number of months and year he had spent in Correctional Services Canada (CSC): a total of 20 years, nearly half his life for becoming addicted to drugs and theft to pay for them as a way to numb his unbearable experiences in residential school. In Canada, a life-term sentence to jail is 25 years (CSC, 2012). He has literally been given a non-sequential lifetime sentence. I ask him,

*Does that hit you, you know, the idea, 47 minus 20 years? It's just so profound, I comment.*

*If I let it hit me big time I become emotional with it and then it peaks. It becomes, my weaknesses start to act out. I tend to get grumpy a lot. I tend to get, my thinking starts to get distorted. I start to break down, he explains.*  
(February 16, 2011)

Herein lies this participant's burgeoning strength. Patrick is well aware of his propensity to be triggered by thought, his vacillating inability to control his sentiments.

*I'll be this rebellious person. I don't care if they accept me or whatever. But I mean, I do care. I have feelings. I have emotions. Just like the person I hurt. I'm thinking about those people now. I'm thinking about them and I think about their feelings and become more empathetic with them. My partner is showing me about empathy; being empathetic. And more about love. She's like my little Buddha. (February 16, 2011)*

Trapped from within fire and emotional upheaval, slowly testing safer waters, Patrick also shares,

*I specifically like Warriors because I have a rapport with them. I also have to look at the fact that there are not too many other resources that I can go to that have family now because of what my charges has led me to [working towards getting into the details of his crimes, anger and resentment]. Learning how to go into details. Details that take me deeper emotionally. (February 16, 2011)*

Terry too, talks of anger during his earlier years. He discusses the demands he felt emotionally deserving of during his initial efforts to heal.

*When I first went into the group I was in denial with myself and trying to figure out why I was the way I was and why I was carrying so much anger towards the world and others that may have crossed my path. Back in the day I would have laid blame at others, for their actions would make me act the way I am, I always blamed others but you know, today I'm obviously in a whole different perspective—360 turn around with myself.*

*I ask, Can you tell me about your anger? Does that stem from personal experience or from intuitive knowing [like kinesthetic, heart or blood memory]?*

*My anger stems from personal experience from my upbringings. My parents were into their addiction of alcoholism and they split up in 1992. Since then I've been living from house to house with my mom and then eventually put into foster care with my aunt until my dad cleaned up and took us back in 1984. But then the abuse started again with that and I was put back into the environment of my parent's addictions. (March 16, 2011)*

Because participants Terry, Patrick and David each describe their transformation processes of anger, of interrupted culture and family, of turning to substance misuse and of sometimes feeling 'human' again, I next question White Owl.

*Did you ever feel that you had to come out of jail and learn how to be a human being?*

*I just got tired of going to jail and I just felt there was something better out here. (December 9, 2010)*

The notion of that ‘something better’ resonates with me because of Coyote and Squirrel, who, not unlike the participants, let me be a brief visitor into their world. Stories sometime evoke in me questions that I am not able to answer but nevertheless, I voice them for my readers to consider. Although I am interested in understanding what it is about jail that fatigued White Owl, I can only wonder. Not all questions such as ‘How did he use the teachings provided in jail to prepare himself for his eventual release?’ need be answered at this time. In closing White Owl and my conversation, I ask,

*Where do you see yourself in five years from now?*

*His epigram: Hopefully still above ground. (December 9, 2010)*

## **Youth**

*We were really sheltered; it was really strict until I was 17. We couldn't even talk to boys. Mind you, I couldn't even – I wasn't able to – because of what I was doing – what was done to me ... And that stuff was our world ... But, yeah, I toughed it out until I was 17 and I couldn't hack it anymore and I went with my grandpa.*

~ Patsy (Former Member, December 17, 2010)

In this section, Ryan, WAVS youth group co-leader and I re/present his perspectives on behalf of the youth whom he mentors. My approach is slightly unconventional; nevertheless, he takes to my spontaneity. I begin,

*In reading your first transcript, Ryan, your focus is on the youth rather than yourself and that's perfect because it really hits me, to focus on the youth again. A word list came to mind for me—Does that work?*

*Sounds good, yeah. So is it the first thing that comes to my mind?*

*Yes and any other single words that you can draw from it. Okay, a quick summary, here: loyalty, trust, belonging, safety, confidentiality/disclosure and culture ... Does the way I am asking these word questions work for you?*

*Yes, absolutely, it's allowing me to focus and think of examples. (March 18, 2011)*

Ryan communicates the immediacy of youth experiences. In the moment, some youth are living in a specific time and space, whether it's a world of violence, confusion, healing or triumph. Conversely, adult members are dealing with perhaps twenty to forty years of past experiences and memories that youth are not because of their chronological age. I ask Ryan to expand on this concept.

*Some youth, we've had instances, trying to work with a harsh event that happened when they were a little younger ... she'd be 16 now but she's talking about something that happened when she was younger, between [age] nine and twelve or so. That's only four years [ago] as opposed to an older crowd, perhaps my age, about 30, so that's quite a bit of age difference. (March 18, 2011)*

For youth, harsh events can be difficult but not insurmountable as one or more of the many challenges we face in life. The realization that while 'harsh' does typically have a negative connotation, at its most basic; it is still just a measure of the degree of severity. Thus, even the positivity that healing and being healthy can be harsh. In fact, becoming unhealthy is much easier than becoming healthy. One might even argue, it's a more pleasurable process. Nevertheless, they can feel extremely daunting and hold a strong place in psychologically growing adolescents (Brokenleg and Van Bockern, 2003). Children and young adults aged 24 or younger represent almost half (48%) of Aboriginal peoples across Canada. Aboriginal children and youth coming into contact with the state through the child welfare or judicial systems in order to ensure their safety, well-being or to prevent recidivism is not working (*The Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA)*, 2010).



Police-reported data for 2009 indicate that children and youth under the age of 18 were most likely to be sexually victimized or physically assaulted by someone they knew (85% of incidents). Nearly 55,000 children and youth were the victims of a sexual offence or physical assault in 2009, about three in 10 of which were perpetrated by a family member. Six in ten children and youth victims of family violence were assaulted by their parents. The youngest child victims (under the age of three years) were most vulnerable to violence by a parent. In 2009, the rate of family-related sexual offences was more than four times higher for girls than for boys. The rate of physical assault was similar for girls and boys. (p. 5)

The YCJA report seems to recognize that legal provisions need to be made that takes into consideration and put into broader systemic context, the cultural and linguistic diversity and socioeconomic differences that exist for Aboriginal peoples. Section 38 (2)(d) reinforces these notions by stating, “Particular attention to the circumstances of Aboriginal young persons, all available sanctions other than custody should be considered” (p. 15). However, outcomes for children remain devastating: 73% of youth involved with the young offenders system in B.C. are also involved with the child protection system and only 21% of former youth in care graduate from high school compared with 78% the general population. In B.C., young women who are in the permanent care of the province are four times more likely to become pregnant than other young women who have never been in care. When these children become parents they disproportionately lose their own children to the foster care system, thus perpetuating the cycle of broken families of imprisoned men, isolated and shamed women and children and youth apprehended by the Ministry of Children and Family Development intended for foster home placements. Solutions to systemic injustices need to be proposed in consideration of Aboriginal peoples’ burgeoning population.

As we continue with our youth-centered, characterized word list, Ryan defines how loyalty plays a part among his Warriors’ group members. A recently new member tells him,

*‘I go to a lot of youth group meetings and stuff and I see a lot of groups and everything but this is the only one where we actually stay together after the proper meeting. Like, we all leave together, after the group we take each other to the sky train stop, it’s the only one that we’ve done that [closing*

*group nights]. It's pretty cool, it's pretty cool ... even if someone says, 'I need to go to the washroom, so wait for me.' So we all do that wait for one another.*

*We haven't touched on belonging yet* I prompt him.

*In the adult group, the circle, where people feel safe and yeah, they feel that sense of belonging. Actually it does happen with the youth too. I know they are calling one another, keeping in touch and now hanging around together sometimes on the weekends. [Sometimes] I say, 'I'm sorry I can't meet up with you like we usually do' but they say, 'Oh, that' okay, I'm meeting up with so and so before we head to the meeting.' So we have meetings together and then our walks afterwards to get home. (March 18, 2011)*

According to Ryan, between the teenagers and young adults, trusting relationships with each other are being established; members are talking more and disclosing to one another more and just like in any normal relationship, disagreements happen. He adds, *Now what they work towards is, hopefully they can put the WAVS tools in place to learn and practice them* (March 18, 2011).

I wonder about the youth in terms of culture and if it plays into the youths' healing processes at WAVS, so I comment to him,

*I'm thinking back to this idea of linking. What about culture? I mean, if we don't know it, were never taught it, [and for reasons of health and balanced wellness], may we need to be learning it, slash, practicing it – then what is the significance or the meaning of culture in the youths' lives?*

He replies, *They're expressing high interest for it. They're touching base a little bit with it, with smudging and prayer, also with drum making and doing a little bit of art work. (March 18, 2011)*

Hearing that some members are reaching into the community on their own and joining local drumming and singing groups, I cannot help but encourage,

*Great news, initiating culture on their own.*

*Wow, I never really thought of that! Ryan shares. They are in the drum group; some are inviting others, inviting drummers to our group to teach drumming. Some are learning about powwows ... so it's cool when they tell me about these things. (March 18, 2011)*

As we close our conversation I inquire about the impact or significance that Ryan witnesses in the Warriors' youth. He optimistically assured me they are *happy and intrigued* by what they are learning from WAVS that helps their lives. *Like the smudging, for example, they're asking, like what is this for, I like the smell of it, the cleansing aspect of it*, he explains (March 18, 2011). For the youth, it seems like their curiosity is a motivator to engage in cultural practices. How is culture so tied to healing? Consider an Aboriginal perspective of longevity:

One cannot be said to have wisdom until others acknowledge an individual's respect and responsible use and teaching of knowledge to others. Usually, wisdom is attributed only to Elders but this is not because they have lived a long time. What one does with knowledge and the insight gained by knowledge are the criteria for being called an 'Elder'. (Archibald, 2008, p. 17)

Learning just how youth are showing interest in re/claiming and re/vitalizing culture indicates, to me, Archibald's resolution about Elders and wisdom weaving together cross-generational knowledge: it is our youth who will someday be our wise knowledge-keepers.

#### **4.2.4 West: *We learn from what people have to say about us.* ~ Freda**

##### **Physical**

*My Mom and Dad left the reserve because there was too much violence and corruption, abuse, murders, suicide rates highest in Canada. I'm just guessing we lost thousands of people. From what I know originally, our tribe was nomadic.*

~ Gerry (Present Member, December 6, 2010)

Our physical aspects of being-ness allow us to be present to our sacred vitality and ourselves, encourage Young and Nadeau (2005). Healthy physical needs include access to medical support and services, a clean safe place to live, good nutrition and exercise, help with addictions, medicines and alternative and traditional medicines such as soap berries, sweetgrass, sage, juniper and cedar (Hill and Fridkin, 2008). Participants teach me just how paramount a stable home is to good health, let alone healing from unhealthy familial events.

Keeping in mind the cultural poverty about which Dion Stout speaks, in more conventional terms Aboriginal peoples are very vulnerable to poverty in many larger Canadian cities. According to the Urban Poverty in Canada report published by the Canada Council on Social Development (CCSD) (2000, 2007), “The poverty rate for Aboriginal people in cities was 42.8% – more than double the rate for non-Aboriginal people (19%)” (p. 18). Of the 17 cities listed in the study, Vancouver reported the highest Aboriginal poverty rate at 59.5% (2000, 2007). Several factors contribute to high poverty rates such as barriers to education and employment opportunities, which in turn, also affect housing conditions for many people (2000, 2007). Although this 2000 source date is 12-years old and one would hope to find more recent statistics, the latter 2007 version contains the exact same graphs and numbers previously reported. It is disconcerting to think that while Statistics Canada has the funds for the 2007 publication, it seemingly does not for new research that would further validate the alarming rates of poverty among First Nations peoples.

Patrick commands my full attention when he outlines some of his ‘shelter’ locales. I clarify,

*So, some nights you’re under the Granville Street Bridge and some nights in a hotel?*

*He adds, I also had to survive under bridges because I didn’t have a place to stay. Whether it was wintertime or raining, I had to, uh, learn how to survive. I’d do crime in order to do some stuff that I needed. Most of the times I was on the streets because I spent my money on drugs and I didn’t have rent money. (December 8, 2010)*

In Vancouver hotel rooms in poorer neighbourhoods like the Downtown Eastside are commonly known as single-room occupancies that as Patrick describes, are far less than the humanness he continuously seeks. *A lot [of rooms] had bed bugs. Some of them had*

*cockroaches or mice, so I didn't like living in them, anyway. The street was better off for me. The place was kind of violent and they were more or less interested in the money rather than the patrons* (February 14, 2011). The lowest rung of poverty—or the 'survival of the fittest' model of life is all too real for some participants. One can only imagine Patrick's contentious survival skills in his trapped years of addiction, homelessness and recovery.

Systemic housing-oppression can also be seen in the process of obtaining shelter for Aboriginal people living on the streets. Patrick, Gerry and Roberta each speak of shelter difficulties as a necessary precursor to healing. In serendipitous irony about homelessness in Vancouver I experience the following:

*On the way to meet with M., I park my car and as I walk along Broadway and I accidentally kick and almost trip on a very large piece of flattened cardboard laying was on the sidewalk. I didn't fall, thank goodness but it strikes me that it isn't any piece of cardboard. It is a piece of very large, abandoned, flattened cardboard that a homeless person might sleep on. 'I consider, 'This cardboard could have been someone's bed this morning before I've just walked across it.'* (Personal Field Note, March 3, 2011)

Michael emphasizes the importance of a home—which seems to symbolize not only a shelter but also stability of health and emotional well-being. I ask him,

*Would social support work for everyone?*

*Oh, I think a lot of the ones who wouldn't take [a housing opportunity] would be more, like those having health issues that can't be around other people or in close spaces, right? But I think that the youth that I work with ... I see [those] getting healthy and more educated are the ones that would find stable housing.* (December 9, 2010)

Who then, is able to find and be accepted into subsidized housing—only the mentally stable? For low income and marginalized peoples this present crisis stems back to the early 80s. Government policy navigated the closure of B.C.'s Riverview Hospital on the grounds that it was no longer legal to have people committed to care against their will, a motion that would clearly also assist government funds allocated for the institutional care of admitted

patients. While this constitutional discernment of valid consent may be true, the decision became the founding trigger to Vancouver's urban, mentally-ill and homeless population.

The Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) Homeless count (Goldberg, Graves, Eberle, et. al., 2005) uses two categories of homelessness. "Street homeless" are those who live outdoors on streets, in parkades, parks and beaches. "Sheltered homeless" are those who have temporary shelter in emergency or transition shelters or in a friend's home with a lack of security and financial means to pay rent. Street homeless among those surveyed revealed that 70% were Aboriginal (p. 27), suggesting Aboriginal homeless people avoid shelters; they are inadequately served by shelters; or they were under-reported by shelter staff. Reasons given for homelessness were multifaceted, with most declaring deficiency of earnings (44%); living with health conditions such as asthma or diabetes or addictions (25%); and the high costs of housing (22%) (p. 15). Street homelessness points to lack of money as the major cause of their homelessness, while the sheltered homeless indicate health and addictions more often were their problems. Women made up 26% of the total counted homeless, while Aboriginal women accounted for 36% of the homeless population. "There were proportionately more women among the total Aboriginal homeless population (35%) than among the total non-Aboriginal homeless (27%)" (p. 27). For Aboriginal women who are already vulnerable other systemic forces of oppression coupled with realities such as poverty might increase the risk of homelessness, especially for those with lone responsibility for children. Among Aboriginal women this is more likely the case, especially in metropolitan regions such as the GVRD, where 46% of Aboriginal children live with a lone parent (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2003).

Unfortunately, when institutions such as homeless shelters that are charged with providing supports and services to lift Aboriginal peoples out of the destitute conditions of homelessness are apparently underutilized, inadequate or avoided altogether. Aboriginal women and children are negatively impacted and further marginalized. For instance,

To apply for housing with Lu'ma Native Housing Society, at least fifty percent (50%) of the applicant's family must be of Aboriginal ancestry. This includes First Nations, Aboriginal, Inuit and Metis persons who may be status or non-status. Eligibility is evaluated on an individual basis through assessment of income, family size, health, current housing conditions, being a student, etc. (Lu'ma Native Housing Society, 2012)

Roberta, my guiding Elder throughout this study, tells a housing story of helpless disdain: in trying to find housing for her sister, she is told each facility has its own intake requests and dictates that she and her sister must contact each housing organization individually to learn of their specific criteria before applying. Finding 'good days' when an addicted person is on her best behaviour, not to mention family members needing time off work to attend multiple intake appointments is a time-consuming, if not impossible expectation. Those able to begin a path towards healthier futures that include finding housing and/or regaining custody of their children in ministerial care often face circular perpetuating colonial processes of fragmenting families and problematizing basic necessities of life.

WAVS provides a 'sheltered' space of belonging and recovery that some members, in the worst of their struggles, may not have previously had. I can immediately bring to my mind's eye the co-ed, Monday evening group room:

*The room is upstairs to the right, at the end of the hall. It is large, long like a double room and bright, painted white. Two couches are at one end of the room; two double closet doors are at the other end. Windows are across the length of the room opposite the door we enter. A counter/sink is to the right of the door and a table with food (for dinners) is against the closet doors, opposite the couches. Chairs are set up in an oval fashion around the room connecting to the two couches. I enter the room and sit in front of the window, with my back to them. (Group Meeting Field Note, April 15, 2009)*

The 'upstairs living-room' is where the women's Thursday evening group members meet in comfort on three couches, low floor-lamp lighting and a fireplace hearth. The men's Thursday evening meetings take place in the 'downstairs living-room'. Ambiances such as these, although they cannot make up for members' past home settings, provide safe walls within which voiced disclosure and experiential wisdom is spoken. At Warriors, physical space is transformed into a safe and caring conceived place of commonality and trust.

### **Water**

*The creation of the Change of Seasons society, which became a model for similar programs across Canada from Cape Breton Island to Vancouver Island. The trainees developed a*

*truly unique way of working with men and boys through a combination of group work, individual work, crisis intervention, social development and community organization, political lobbying, public speaking, sweats, cold water bathing, smudging, canoeing, dancing, singing and much more.*

~ Bruce Wood (Change of Seasons Program Co-founder, March 23, 2011)

In this themed section, water appears to make a metaphorical appearance in participant stories: from the local 'watering hole' where neighbourhood people meet and to 'ripples in the pond' of inferences. No matter the vision the universal theme remains a strong interconnectedness among Aboriginal peoples and the WAVS mandate. When I ask how she and Dan met, Gail makes reference to fluidity in this way.

*I knew Dan when I was a child. His mum and my uncle used to go together. My mother and his mother – they all drank together and stuff. Because in the city here, there weren't many Native people. And if they were Native people who drank, they all knew each other. That was the way it was. (December 9, 2010)*

For Gail the local watering hole offers a sense of cohesiveness and belonging for the new Native people coming to town. Sadly that same entity of unity for some becomes addictive. Gail continues, *There were always places like that. We'd see each other [she and Dan] off and on—run into each other over the years. Our lives were both on a destructive path.*

When reflecting upon his life and seeing his actions ripple like water that can potentially impact every/one/thing around him Patrick recognizes, *I had that kind of ability to ripple communities and society at large. I had that ability to ripple it and the consequence for me is that I'm suffering it now* (December 8, 2010). Lastly, Bruce Wood summarizes his oceanic years of working as a community leader for families needing anti-violence training.

*There has been a real sea of change in perspective and approach among many of those who have been working with men and family violence. The balance between confrontation and healing is better understood and offered. The caring/challenging approach has been validated for many of us through the continuing success rates in programs across Canada and it is clear that we are doing a better job because more men are staying with our groups and not 'dropping out'. (March 23, 2011)*



The communal surge of water from earth or urban gatherings, contributes to curing individual selves, families, communities and eventually, nations.

## Adults

*Someone has to be the responsible adult, so I guess it has to be me because—yeah. That's one thing my mom and my step-dad taught—if you have kids, you have to take care of them.*

~ Patsy (Former Member, December 17, 2010)

For those of our grandchildren who cannot yet speak, Freda opens her heart to speak of intimate details between her mother, herself and her daughter. *That was part of [my daughter's] problem. Her anger ... when my mom died, she [my daughter] told me she had hated me since my mom died. And that was because she said that before my mom was dying, my mom was asking for her* (December 6, 2010). The impact of loved ones dying seems to leave a piece of us dead along with them. Emotions and actions can also become extreme.

*I'm wondering, Freda, when you're at Warriors, what do you take home with you to your daughter?*

*She explains, I try to be different; I try to breath or not answer her sometimes, so I don't get into an argument with her. I just keep to myself – in fact I feel like I'm the child and she's the mother at one point because she'd be yelling at me and I'd go to my bedroom – it felt like '[being sent to] my room' (laughs) – and I'd stay in there and it was really – our home didn't feel like a home. It was broken apart and the only things I was close to were my kitty-cats.*

(December 6, 2010)

Although my question to Freda infers she is a family leader who takes home WAVS learnings to her daughter—to emulate a responsible parent to which Patsy earlier refers—Freda emphasizes that some role reversals take place. With regards to violence towards family members age 65 or older,

Common assault, the category of least serious physical harm to victims, was the most common violent offence committed by family members against seniors in 2009. This offence accounted for more than half (53%) of all family violence. Another 21% of family-related

violence involved uttering threats ... These proportions were similar for both male and female senior victims. (Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2009, p. 28)

Returning to Freda's haven with her cats, I instantly relate to such bonds with family pets as one of my favorite memories surfaces. In the early 1990s my calico cat had a litter of kittens. On the morning Tessie deemed necessary she gingerly jumped onto my bed where I was still sleeping and nestled into the crook of my bent knees. I instantly awoke and over the course of an hour or so as I softly encouraged her with words and gentle strokes, Momma cat gave birth to five kittens. Like Freda, Julie Cruikshank (1998) knows of Indigenous connections between the natural world, animals and human society:

In a framework where animals and humans are understood to share common states of being that include family relationships, intelligence and common responsibility for maintenance of a shared world, the rights and obligations obtaining to relationships among people also extend to the natural world. Interaction with the physical world, then, is a social relationship and consequently it is rarely straightforward. (p. 60).

Within webs of social interaction various forms of hurt from and to one another can translate into broken homes. The notion of a 'broken home' is striking because it almost always refers, not to architectural structures, but to the people within and the nature of their relations with each other. About her childhood home, Freda teaches me the strength of witnessing our childhoods, no matter the positive or negative moment.

*I don't want to say all bad things about [our dad] because he did look after us ten children. Whenever he went somewhere, he took us with him. He never left us behind. He provided for us all the time. We were very poor. We weren't on welfare, he wasn't on unemployment, we had to go pick up cans and bottles – Oh and pick up scrap metal to pay ten cents to go see a movie. (December 6, 2010)*

As adults the ability to support a family is often taken for granted. It is beyond simply providing money and can meld into a form of love in never 'leaving his children behind.' The entire Indigenous family, a vacillating assembly of children, youth, adults, Elders and ancestors is key to wellness. Teachings of mutual support, cooperation and work ethics are a fundamental component of a family as Freda confirms about her parents, *They taught us to do hard work. To do things like that to survive and we did it as a family, so it was good. They taught us work ethics and they wanted us to get educated and so on and so forth* (December 6, 2010).

#### **4.2.5 North: *Every choice brings meaning to where I am now.* ~ Terry**

##### **Air/Universal**

*Well, I feel good, taking ownership of all my negative [original, used as a noun]. And I want to carry on and enjoy life. I'm 55-years old ... we're not here for a long time, so I may as well enjoy life and feel happy now that I've found myself. And I don't have to go to prison and isolate myself and hide from people.*

~ David (Former Member, December 7, 2010)

In his above observation David emphasizes universal breath and life. He seems ready to really begin living and invites me to understand his point of view that coveted air outdoors of institutional constraints flows and reminds us we are alive. Individual experiences can also be common to many. Often the physical time spent in institutes, whether they are residential schools, foster homes or correctional facilities can become less significant. Psychological time takes over so that 'finding' ourselves may become a life-long quest. Isolated beaches on *Sechelt Nation* land about which I earlier speak, become communally treasured and taking responsibility can calm oceans of human turmoil.

Terry describes some of his familial chaos in terms of reaching a time in his life when he can now understand past and present horizons:

*Today I understand now where the past experiences come from and where it all stems from – with my teachings. I'm able to make the connectiveness now that my parents did the best they could with what they had knowing that*

*... their parents, they weren't there to teach them, so they weren't there to teach me ... And, to make that connectiveness has really opened my mind more to dig deep and to come to the realization that I can't blame my parents anymore. It's not their fault. It's not my grandparents' fault. (March 16, 2011)*

I feel gifted as Terry offers me his double meaning of 'teachings'—those he learned from his Elders and those he now shares with me. Universal journeys such as the participants face about violence can be tragic ones that understandably elicit thoughts of retribution. Meanwhile, as they also hold what was once taken from them through colonization such as culture, health and peace of mind, there becomes no one to blame. Aikenhead and Ogawa (2007) explain,

Through long observation [Indigenous Peoples] have become specialists in understanding the interconnectedness and holism of our place in the universe. Moreover, Indigenous observations are monist and hence they relate to a metaphysical inner space in systematic ways known to certain Elders within each community. Indigenous empiricism enjoys spiritual power. (p. 562)

Leslie warns me of non-Aboriginal, non-'spiritual powers' that lack wholistic reverence—for respecting not only our bodies—but also our world. In our conversation he references the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill (also referred to as the British Petroleum (BP) oil spill), in the Gulf of Mexico that exploded and then flowed constant for three months in 2010. By moving from his personal storywork to upholding his more universal beliefs, Leslie teaches me collective and connective awareness:

*I think that every member of BP Oil or whatever—they should be taking 'life-skills [training]'. They should be taking Medicine Wheel courses. They should be taking journeys into spirituality because they're missing something in their lives if they feel like they can get away with this sort of abuse of Mother Nature and think that there are no repercussions of that. We will feel the effects we're yet to suffer from. (December 1, 2010)*

The use of tools (oils) and nature (air) for environmental damage and recovery is inclusive of land, life, sky, sea, self and the very fire of our core, our sacred selves. Leslie instills in me that restorative wellness of humanity must be transparent, not secretive.

### **Intellectual**

*My mom is an intelligent woman, I mean that's where I got all my smarts, that's where all us kids got our smarts from because she's so intelligent. Why she's with this Italian man? And they're still together. ... I said, 'How did you deal with this guy?' I had to leave because he's such an awful person. And she said, 'Oh, I pray' because my family is religious – my whole family is religious. ... Catholicism, yeah. And so I go, 'You must be praying 24/7.' And she said, 'Yeah, basically.' So she's praying all the time. She's really—my mom's a decent person. She's honest, she's hard working.*

~ Patsy (Former Member, December 17, 2010)

For the benefit of practicing good health our intellectual minds need to understand matters such as Indigenous and Western views about medicines; adapting and accepting life changes; learning and sharing about prevention; living with a positive attitude; keeping up to date on new information; and remaining awareness of services and support available. In her book, *The Horses We Love, the Lessons We Learn* (2007), Bastian bridges animals' and peoples' innate, yet interconnected knowledges.

There is really not great mystery in trying to better understand the people we meet and how to deal with the challenges we face in our lives. It is available to everyone who chooses to use it. It's a simple thing called common sense. If you trust your instincts and use your common sense in facing any challenge, you will have the key that unlocks the door to a good relationship with almost every person you meet and every challenge you face. (Bastian, 2007, p. 5)

There are multiple ways in which we, as diverse, alive peoples can learn from one another. During one group meeting, for instance,

*Joe gives an update about his best friend, Dan's health by telling those of us in the circle to 'be ready'. At first I think he means to be ready for Dan's death; however, I quickly realize that he is inferring each of us to be ready for our own deaths and to live a good life. Use good medicine. We need our family or we will be returned to [having to] use the survival skills we know, out on the streets. (Group Meeting Field Note, April 26, 2010)*

Elders teach intellectual wisdom, that our heart is meant to be full and if there is something good that needs to come in and we need to release a part of it to make room.

David sees the potential for great change through a program like WAVS. He shows awareness of his steadfast commitment to healing and that it involves a parallel commitment to attend WAVS. Sharing what he learns at group meetings, he says, *There are ways human beings can be happy doing what they're doing. They're happy, they're not pretending to be happy. They're not waiting for a hand out, they're doing what they're doing* (December 7, 2010). Somewhere in our discussion we focus on education and on intellectually choosing a life without violence. I probe him,

*In what ways do you educate yourself?*

*By reading and writing. And listening and paying attention when they talk and not interrupting them. It kind of helped to make change with how I think and what I do. And about what's life's all about. And life's is good. I'm the only one who creates [my] problems. No one else. Just me. (December 7, 2010)*

David points to education, particularly Indigenous knowledge as pertinent to the ways continues to heal. His understanding of wholism also includes responsibility as both teacher and learner and activities of reading, listening, role modeling and mentoring.

## Elders/Ancestors

*The words, we do not own these words, the teachings. Its their purpose in life to pass it on, we're oral people so that's why there's no books. So knowing this for myself this is what I understand, yes, I've picked up many teachings, many different teachings from across Canada in different places, different ceremonies that have these teachings so to help me I know this may help this other person if I give it to them when I hear the right situation for me to apply that teaching to them.*

~ Joe (December 15, 2010)

In Archibald (2008) Mary Uslick pronounces,

When our ancestors talk about our mountains, our rivers, our trees and our lakes, they got names for all these places ...The names of the mountains and everything was given by our ancestors because it had a meaning and when it [the name] was given and it should be respected ...That's how they teach the children about it. First of all, they must know the name of that mountain, why the old people call it that. (p. 73)

As a researcher I find myself oscillating between traditional formations of naming and of more contemporary ways of both written and oral words deemed as 'knowledge'. *But remember, both are needed*, my subconscious Joe-teaching reminds me. Just last night during one of our many 10 pm telephone conversations as friends, Roberta re/affirms my intuitive protocol: *You know how to listen to your Elders. Others do not* (Personal Communication, February 20, 2012). "A wise person knows the way, being able to discard what must be discarded and adopt what must be adopted" says the Dalai Lama and Farber (2005) within their *Living Wisdom* collection of reading cards, photographs and music. Throughout my partnership with WAVS, I hope to discard what I must and adopt what I am meant to from participants. White Owl shares with me his multiple stories, strands of conversation that are like stones, driftwood and kelp that line Coast Salish territory beaches and become blended into this particular passage:



*A long time ago our people, they were taught to be good in their hearts, good to everybody, respectful, kind and gentle since when they're babies right to when they grow up. Their way of life is a law. The way of life is to be good. But now we don't have that culture ... it's really fragmented and damaged because of this system, what we live under ... Canadian system ... Even some of our leaders are still lost. (December 9, 2010)*

Is the loss of a soul about one's spirit or one's spiritual thinking? White Owl suggests that it is more than that. He seems to uphold a personal, 'no-blame policy' and suggests that things will change. Recalling the Seachelt beach I hold in mind's eye, its spacious visual reminds me that tides of Indigenous knowing can nudge where we are in the moment and the directions toward why and how we need to heal.

I return to Joe to understand his paradoxical role of being an Elder and a Knowledge Keeper. Does he have a responsibility to pass on his wisdom as a WAVS facilitator? He explains:

*There are people out there unfortunately that will take all these teachings and put them in their pocket and not share them with people, saying 'I have some knowledge that you don't have and I'm better than you so you come to me and I'll help you'. Yes it's good, but to help that individual understand that they can help themselves by following certain teachings. They can pass this knowledge onto somebody else who may need that similar teaching in that time or situation. So I pass it on. (December 15, 2010)*

The topic of passed along storywork can be an incredibly a large, vast web of versions, in/ex/clusions and teachings. David talks about mentorship tides, something he learned from Warriors.

*I learned from Joe, how to be responsible for your own self. So when I work with the youth, there's 50 of them, [aged] 14 to 24. And they look at me as an Elder but I don't consider myself an Elder. I'm a human being. I'm not a medicine man or an Elder. The reason for that ... I am a great-grandfather and a grandfather but I don't consider myself as a holy man. Maybe later on in the years but right now I'm just a human being learning about life, learning about myself. That's what I want to fix. (December 7, 2010)*

David's sense of humility, even his natural self-doubt is paradoxically what seems to make him trustworthy. His journey of learning about himself and of learning about life is the same one undertaken by the youth he mentors. He seems to deny his Indigenous role as Elder but prefers being called a grandfather, perhaps because he wants to address his nurturing and practical role in raising Aboriginal children through to healthy adulthood. David takes everyday concepts like 'grandfather' and 'belonging' and explicates the meanings they hold for him.

*[WAVS is] where I found myself, my feelings, my anger and where I felt accepted. Where people are really listening and people are trying to help each other to support each other to get better ... to get better in ways of living or to enjoy themselves ... as a human being, you know, to be a human.*  
(December 7, 2010)

Conversion is the first of many baby steps on the long walk to freedom. It takes time to learn the means to heal.

## 4.3 Closing Discussion

While chapter 3 of this dissertation deals with the methodology used to learn from and assist with Aboriginal families healing from challenges affecting their communities, this chapter focuses on articulating and conceptualizing WAVS' *cultural* components. These include the symbolic Medicine Wheel of wholistic wellness, rituals, storytelling, talking circles and why they are important interventions. In addition to societal inequalities that can cause us to judge each other, competition for social resources other and/or harm each other and deny our innate weaknesses, personal flaws and past circumstances. The result is severe damage to one another's' Sacred-self. Although people are not born inherently judgmental or abusive they may adapt to become this way in order to survive—sometimes 'fighting', sometimes 'fleeing', but in either case—disconnected from greater rhythms of nature and of society.

As a remedy cultural practices and rituals, no matter the place from which generation they originate remind First Nation peoples of our connections to the land, to a higher spiritual reality and to each other. Herein lies the importance of culture-specific practices to reinforce these connections and to pave the way for collaborative wholistic and sustainable healing. In

contrast, a mainstream intervention model (e.g. a 12-step model for healing from alcoholism or refraining from violence) that incorporates little of the culture of the people it seeks to help, may exhibit a more limited focus. This myopic view is often one too generic for its intended goals and audiences. It may merely be a sufficient-enough practice for as wide a range of demographic groups as possible, rather than an effective practice that works best for any particular individual, family or group. Within the former framework, an intervention model might not do much apart from dictate how one should regulate one's behavior. Instead, it can disassociate someone from a maelstrom of sources of his/her deep-seeded problems. A lack of spiritual or cultural teachings; emotional abuse (past or present); physical poverty and hunger; and lack of knowledge/information on how to lead a better life, can occur. Alternatively, the WAVS model as a culture-specific model puts the necessary focus on what peoples share in common as a result of their shared heritage; how their problems arise from many of the same sources; and how one's healing is linked to the healing of a larger whole. All are fundamentally tied to a person's life story and the history of the family/community/culture to which he/she belongs.

In this particular chapter section, I feel compelled to offer insights from Donna, who teaches me values of seeking wholism and of mentally-strenuous healing. Like other participants she emphasizes two key parts of the whole: the individual self and the familial self, where both are inextricably bound. As a positive result, "When we dwell in that balanced center point; we cannot be controlled by our strong feelings or thoughts. From this sacred center, whatever action we take will be taken because we decided to act and because it was good to do so" (Lane et al., p. 68). Donna categorizes her and Patrick's imbalanced Sacred-selves,

*We're talking monumental pain and dysfunction that flows down into everybody we come into contact with. [It takes] patience to wade through this. Like treating the whole person, the whole person. She describes her former self, when she and Patrick first met, as a raging alcoholic, I'm a depressive ... I'm dependent ... I'm co-dependent who has experienced different forms of violence and lack of control resulting in mental, emotional and physical abuse. (December 3, 2010)*

She also points toward an understanding that unification of the complete self, where all quadrants of the Medicine Wheel are in harmony with each other is necessary for healing to

take hold. This harmonious cycle includes shifting histories—what crystalizes then, is what happened in the past and what may repeat itself, without the ‘growing pains’ of awareness and great inner-self work. The power of words, imposed or otherwise, to capture feelings and events is evident in many of the participants’ stories. For example, about Patrick, Donna compassionately tells me,

*He’s my buddy; he’s my friend. I love him. Despite our two separate places in the universe in everything—our age, our education, our race, our culture our background -- it couldn’t be more opposite. [But] somehow we meet.*  
(December 3, 2010)

## Chapter 5: WAVS Members' Learnings

*Because my Métis skin colour is whiter than many First Nations peoples I feel privileged; I've not experienced racism in the many overt and/or insidious ways that my mentors like Roberta and Joyce have. However, I do experience able-ism—assumptions and ill-informed attitudes about my disabilities. For example, during recent physiotherapy appointment I am asked to rate my pain levels: 1 being the least to 10 being the highest. 'And what is your pain level at this moment before your appointment?' the receptionist asks me. 'Maybe a 5' I respond, already feeling fatigued for the day and as though I can no longer accurately rate anything in my life. And yet I can specifically reflect on this: when I wake in the morning and slowly sit on the edge of my bed, allowing each of my spinal vertebrae to cautiously stack one-by-one upon themselves and then additionally brace for the weight of my head, my excruciating pain is—a 13, my mind suggests as I write this—off the charts no matter what mainstream linear scale provided to me. Fortunately, after a hot shower and efforts to ready myself for the day, my average pain level settles into a five to seven range. But like racism, it does not cease to exist and perhaps it never will. (Personal Field Note, May 20, 2009)*

### 5.1 Context

In this chapter I move beyond sharing what participants teach me and into the realm of articulating what I learn through their personally intimate yet generous storywork. It is here that I address the second of our collaborative research questions: “How does the WAVS intervention model impact and support members wishing to heal from both their intergenerational and contemporary perceptions and experiences of family violence?” In other words, how do the participants put to use the WAVS model of violence intervention in their socio-person lives outside of the organization? Stories of racism, oppression, punitive demands from society and intergenerational mis/understanding that motivates participants towards healing sometimes evoke in me questions that I am not able to answer. Nevertheless, I voice them for my readers and I to consider. For instance, in the South Dimension where I seek an understanding of the jailed experiences of Patrick, White Owl, David and Leslie, I also consider that not all questions such as ‘How did they use the

teachings provided them in prison to prepare for their eventual release?’ cannot be fully answered within the scope of this particular dissertation. Here, I begin with an overview of participant-experiences healing as a result of the WAVS interventional healing model.

## 5.2 Participatory Healing At WAVS

### 5.2.1 Sacred-Self: *Whatever I do today is going to impact tomorrow.* ~ M.

*I'm getting to know myself ... you know that phrase, 'know thyself?' Well, I'm getting to that stage when I'm starting to know myself. And I've also, how can I put it, the kind of charges that I had was practicing Shamanism, and which deals with your mind, your body, your spirit, your emotions, your energy, movement and all kinds of things. Well, that's the way my brain works. I'm starting to use that in a better ... in a good way now.*

~ Patrick (Present Member, December 8, 2010)

Our Indigenous Sacred-centre can also understand the self as connected to community (Dei, 2000). Despite diversities of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, it could be said there may be a common worldview among Aboriginal peoples—that of wholism. For Indigenous peoples wholism includes a connection to land and its connection to healing, spirituality, and an interconnectedness of universe (Levin and Herbert, 2004). A fundamental epistemology of First Nations peoples is sensing our individual self(ves), our Indigenous wholeness and our collective/ancestral/cultural connectedness to one another. (Aikenhead and Ogawa, 2007; Aluli-Meyer, 2001; Dei, 2000; Public Health Association of BC, 2008). Indigenous spiritual connectedness implies that our self(ves) are not meant to live in isolation. David conjectures that *people care, even if it is negative or positive* (February 18, 2011). He refers to plausible conversations people may have about him. Regardless of how others may perceive a person, negative or not, all thoughts and opinions are welcome in light of the need for interconnectedness that we all have. Living in isolation may mean freedom from criticism but it is not what we strive for; rather, it is interdependence that permits a return to the wellness cycle that once was. Thus, laboring independently through our soci-personal issues signifies a notable disconnect that exists and that we are purposefully excluding our self from our community. Speaking of our-self and of our dis-ease is the first step to making change, especially if we are blinded by entrenched trauma we

likely cannot see the positive or negative impacts of our actions towards our selves and others. David explains one half of this continuum:

*I woke up and had a smudge to help me to have a...a safe day, so having a safe day, I had a good breakfast, looked at myself, cleaned myself then I came and met you [researcher]. And that's what happy is. (December 7, 2010)*

The act of naming our self in problems leads to reconciliation with the past. Through learning that inclusivity with the whole environment is needed for genuine healing, David feels comfortable enough with his life now that he willingly trusts me. By developing a sense of ownership around his past and presently coming to terms with his mistakes he is able to share his knowledge and experience with me. This process also relates to the North Dimension, which encompasses ancestral wisdom.

Participants demonstrate that their decision to heal is a commitment with the self as Leslie proclaims, in reflection about his incarceration: *I had made the decision that I was going to do some healing on this journey and turn my life around. ... I knew that I wanted to make a difference in people's lives* (December 1, 2010). Leslie also extends the healing process to others in an atypical manner and may be considered rather extraordinary for any person in his situation, irrespective of cultural heritage. The more standard outcome of an oppressive-deficit model system like CSC encourages institutional self-destruction. We can accept that the elements of nature are fluid and changing but a decision like Leslie's can be precise with no ebb and flow at all. Nature can change by necessity and so must humans, perhaps. As participants like Terry, M., Patsy, Patrick and David have experienced, some may need to give in to the inevitable flux of life and require a mindful release from the trauma by focusing on a spirituality and conscious return to well-being. However context-based or situational, healing-decisions can still be within our self-control. In the inclusive Indigenous approach, healing must be wholistic. Healing is not as potent if the focus is placed merely on physical health. Due to the interactive nature of health in the total person, healing must address each component of spirit, heart, body and mind. Comprehensive healing of the self requires total healing for all.

### 5.2.2 East: *I remember little bits and pieces of my household.* ~ Patrick

#### Earth

*Some people, some personalities, spirits, souls, whatever – have to learn the hard way. So what better way than to plop them on the planet earth in human form and go, 'Ok, smart ass.*

*You think you want to do it on your own? okay, do it on your own. Go ahead. See what happens.'*

~ Gerry (Present Member, December 6, 2010)

Terry notes that for deep healing to occur the sources of hurt and negative behaviors need to be examined. During our conversation about Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community counselors I ask him,

*In non-Aboriginal counseling, you're suggesting that there's something there that they didn't know how to dig further?*

*I think they dealt more with the surface issues and how to control it and you, here's some tools and write down what I'm feeling now to keep a log of it. But it wasn't helping me to find out where it was coming from and why I was behaving like this, says Terry. (March 16, 2011)*

Reflective of the Eastern Quadrant, an analogy can be drawn to the earth's surface as representative of more simplistic and shallow healing. Conversely, digging deeper into the soil and into the richness of each subterranean layer. Aboriginal people's historically-complex traumas can bring about a more complete process of healing that entails delving into deep-rooted issues. With Terry I wonder aloud,

*Why do you think other Aboriginal organizations are unable to accomplish what you respect Warriors for?*

He diplomatically states, *You know, I haven't had too much experience – I've just had the one with the counseling with that but I can't really say for sure*



*that their approach is not working but I found that it was WAVS that helped me, particularly with me in a way because I can identify to a lot of the participants who are going there and what they're going through. (March 16, 2011)*

Interestingly, for Terry and many of the other participants the notion of being able to relate to others who need healing—even those in need of critical healing—seems to play a significant role in willingness to ‘buy into’ healing. Given exemplar claims and healing potential, the question then becomes, why choose WAVS? It seems to be the members/participants themselves, their relations to one another and the learned use of traditional cultural healing practices that make a huge difference. Familiarity with both the background and the situations of other participants imparts a feeling of comfort. Being in their homeland in spite of the difficult natures of violent traumas acts as a balm. By practicing traditional forms of healing, participants engage in a custom that forges ties with their ancestors who had also lived with and depended on Mother Earth, and I would add Father Sky, Brother Sun and Sister Moon.

Indigenous experiences within difficult urban environments require a radical new model. Cardinal and Armstrong (1991) note,

In the past Native Aboriginals of North America lived their lives in harmony with nature and their own nature. It was a way of thinking, a way of being. It was not a way of adversary, of being adversarial to nature and one's own nature. Their ways were to understand human nature and the environment and their part in it. Aboriginal cultures evolved into a way of being in touch with the earth and experiencing the reality of being part of the earth (p. 12).

Along the same vein Castellano (2000) observes that learning from the land is experiential. Nature is both physical and spiritual simultaneously and interactively: existence only makes sense when physical and spiritual experiences are unified and meld well with wholistic presupposition. Over the past century Indigenous peoples whose lands are now occupied by a concrete landscape have witnessed an adversarial transformation. Access to the earth predominates to one where we must actively seek out the Earth. As such Indigenous

peoples are compelled to develop a relationship with the modern environment that is fused using elements previously found naturally in the earth. Within the earth/deeply-inner analogy, I delve further:

*What I'm hearing, Terry, is the cliché, the difference between a band-aid for symptoms and not healing the original wounds.*

*Exactly. What I'm saying, putting a band-aid on it but they're not really going deep to where it stems from to that anger point. (March 16, 2011)*

Deep issues require solutions of the same magnitude. Not examining the root causes of said issues pays lip service to the matter in question and inadvertently worsens these problems. Mere surface interventions give the impression to those who are only superficially informed about Indigenous issues that enough is already being done. As a result Indigenous peoples are represented as those who cannot or refuse to take advantage of fair opportunities. Such difficulties can be illustrated with a metaphor of someone trying to dig a large hole with a spoon instead of a shovel or even a backhoe. This is also reminiscent of an integral practice in gardening: to remove weeds, simply snapping off the flower portion is not beneficial. Instead, digging deeper to remove the weed by its roots is best; otherwise, it will grow back stronger and fiercer. Yet I wonder, how strong is a weed? Can it be any greater or less in strength than merging crystals of glass that also originate from earthly elements?

In our discussion about M's propensity for breaking glass dishes, she expects me to hopefully supply a subconscious motivation for her destructiveness with glass. Perhaps she seeks a superficial explanation that isn't tied to her own survival since her own interpretation of glass breaking is more perilous—an alternative to wanting to break herself. This glass-breaking habit can also be viewed metaphorically. Glass comes from the sands of Earth—the foundation of all life. A brittle foundation means a vulnerable and tenuous future and indeed for M., it was just that. Her vulnerable foundation of being in and out of the residential school system made everything in her life volatile and she seemed to shatter glass in acceptance of this cruel fate.

## Spiritual

*I just appreciate the way Joe conducts himself. I like the way he prays – he prays for all the directions, he prays for people who are on the street, he prays for people that are in the spirit world. He doesn't forget and if he forgets he says, 'If I've forgotten anything, forgive me.'*

~ David (Former Member, February 28, 2011)

The Elder role models at Warriors, Dan Parker and Joe Fossella, embody the practice of spirituality in their work and in doing so inspire others to engage in Indigenous spiritual tradition. They are cognizant of the interconnectedness of both living and non-living beings, emanating prayers and practices from within the heart. As explained by Donna about the uniqueness of the WAVS wholeness model, it is effective because spirituality and ritual are integral components of the program. Realizing the significant place spirituality holds in the lives of First Nations peoples along the path to healing means establishing a stable foundation that infuses the sacred in each step of the way. Stability is critical to the therapeutic process. Engaging in ritual can also be comforting like a *patchwork quilt* (Donna, December 3, 2010) and predictable habits that occupy the moments of our daily lives. Carrying out these spiritual practices can lend a sense of solid grounding to spiritual people, particularly WAVS members. The result can free our cognitive processes for other more energy-taxing activities. Spirituality is also seen as a cultural practice of Aboriginal peoples that is comforting to those acquainted with or immersed in it. Nevertheless, it may be novel to others, particularly those who have been distanced from traditional practices impacted by colonization. Durie (2004) warns us, "The results of colonization were consistently cataclysmic. A common pattern emerged: loss of culture, loss of land, loss of voice, loss of population, loss of dignity, loss of health and well-being" (p. 1138). Warrior's facilitators help to quell the anxiety of new members who may hold other religious spiritual beliefs by informing them that wholistic healing and balance is key at WAVS, regardless of circumstances, ethnicity or religiosity.

Among the younger generation of Aboriginal peoples, parents involve their children in spirituality as a way to instill cultural values. This intergenerational interaction often promotes a stronger connection between the children and their parents. The passing down of spiritual knowledge, the way Melanie 'cleans' with her children, can result in a deeper relationship between today's youth and their parents whose own familial relationships were forced into disarray as late as only one generation ago. M. succinctly attests to this: *Before*

[residential school] *I can say that I had a pretty idyllic life. I was spoiled, I was treasured, you know, I was raised by my grandparents in the traditional way.* (March 3, 2011). She is one of several participants who cherish their early years being raised by grandparents and the peace of mind that foundation gave them, thus offsetting what would come next.

### Children

[My 12 year-old daughter's ultimatum to me] *was overwhelming at first but it was almost like being able to listen to the little girl in me; something I never had with my mom, being able to say those kinds of things to her without her getting angry or throwing things at me or dragging me around by my hair – which was thee thing that she did on a regular basis.*

~ Melanie (Present Member, March 10, 2011)

For many First Nations people children represent innocence as they bring natural joy into the lives of those around them. Each child is a unique individual and cherished for his or her innocence. Patrick describes that he feels a drive to protect the innocence of these children from the wrath of ignorant adults. Younger ones represent a large piece of his childhood that was taken from him for which he continues to yearn. The trauma he experienced in a residential school effectively thwarted his ability to mature into adulthood.

In Gail's childhood the incessant violence she experienced instinctively compelled her to access an innate wisdom of hiding—thus protecting—herself. Her body learned to sense and to anticipate imminent danger. Intuition coupled with the childhood game of hide-and-seek enabled her to seek safety and presently guide WAVS members. According to Gail this fear is also protection. Unfortunately, not all members who experience such situations developed this instinctual sense on which to rely. Patrick, too, has become used to relying and living on sheer instinct based on his strong ability to live on the streets when not in prison.

I am grateful for Patrick's trust in me to share an exchange such as ours that takes place at a neighbourhood café. Well aware of the notion of 'watching your back' as self-protection, I feel slightly surprised when he arrives for our second conversation and motions me to the back of the café. Following his cue I sit in a plush wingback chair against the wall. Patrick settles into a matching 'face to face' chair whereby his back is to the patrons, the front door and the bustling street pedestrians. Such a position certainly piques my awareness and the following dialogue ensues:

*Patrick, I'm curious. You watch everybody, don't you? I mean, I'm watching you and I'm thinking, are you with me in conversation? Do you still hear my questions? Or do you get distracted? Tell me about that. I mean, you just watch everybody like an eagle. And that's your Aboriginal name – you're ...*

*Young Eagle.*

*Yes, I can see that. You're watching everyone with your Eagle eye (Patrick laughs). But tell me, what brings you to be a people watcher?*

*It let's me know what's here. There are a lot of things that I'm aware of. I came from the street, so I've got to be constantly aware about that part. Like, there could be a robbery, there could be, uh, a violent person coming in, there could be a not-so-nice person coming in, there could be a nice person coming in.*

*Do you feel, like, do you watch like that as a way of protecting those with you?*

*Kind of, yeah. I'm very vigilant in that way ... Just like, as I'm watching you I can hear voices, I can hear chairs rattling, I can hear phones ringing, people talking, people ordering.*

*Can you see the door in your peripheral vision to kind of watch when people are coming in?*

*I can see shadows on the wall. If somebody's walking this way, I can see [their] shadow.*

*So behind me on the wall, while you and I are facing one another and visiting with me, you're also reading shadows; that somebody is walking towards the washroom door to my left.*

*I learned this from jail.*

*Tell me about that?*

*Well, jail is a very volatile place.*

*And did anyone in there take you under their wing and teach you those skills?*

*Nope.* (December 8, 2010)

In other words, he learned them out of necessity. The *volatile* nature of prison that Patrick describes resonates with a description by Leonard Peltier, an American Federal prison inmate. A well-known activist and author of “Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sun Dance” (1997), he gives this description of jail at night and of his awareness of shadows:

Another day ends. That’s good. But now another night is beginning.  
And that’s bad. The nights are worse. The days just happen to you.  
The nights you’ve got to imagine, to conjure up, all by yourself.  
They’re the stuff of your own nightmares. The lights go down but they  
never quite go out in here. Shadows lurk everywhere. Shadows within  
shadows. I’m one of those shadows myself... known as U.S. Prisoner  
# 89637-132. (p. 4)

Both Patrick and Peltier indicate that people can identify each other in many ways, even as shadows or numbers. However, the difference between being identified as such and being identified as people is that shadows and numbers are dehumanized—they lack individual features and look like generic silhouette cut-outs of human beings. Peltier’s observations also speak to the multiple identities that we carry, some very apparent, others kept under the surface until they reveal themselves in environmental changes for better or worse. For example, a child being taken away from her grandparents and placed in residential school or a survivor of family violence walking through the door at WAVS.

Children taking care of children as Patsy previously mentions, is a topic that Millie broaches during our sharing circle. She and Stephanie are the on-site child-minders at WAVS for the Monday and Thursday evening meetings so that parents can attend without worry for their young ones. During our sharing circle Stephanie explores her feelings of coming full circle with WAVS. She also highlights the significant value that Aboriginal children have within her local community in Vancouver.

*I used to work with Aboriginal children before, with children in this program and now I'm in this program where there was only one Aboriginal child there and I missed it. So coming back here, it was nice getting back and helping the young ones learning and teaching them. It's good to be back, coming in and seeing new ones and ones that were here before. (February 1, 2011)*

Millie, the second WAVS child-minder represents an urban Aboriginal person who has adopted some of the more Western parental values. She describes a child-minding experience one evening.

*[She was] probably about 8 and the only thing that I do remember is a little girl being like a parent to her sister. I finally told her, 'Do not look after your siblings while you're here—that's not your job. I want you to be a kid. Play. You're only 8, play.' She just looked at me and I said, 'That's not what your job is here.' Every time her brother cried, she'd run and look after him, [and] I just told her to be a kid. She didn't take to that right away and I understand that because a lot of us grew up too fast when looking after ones that were younger. (February 1, 2011)*

Millie observes and seeks to change this dynamic when she interacts with the older sister who feels it her familial responsibility to look after her younger sibling. It is likely a role instilled in her as soon as her sibling was born. Internalizing this role, it is sometimes difficult for an older sibling to detach from this duty as an older-sibling caregiver when in the setting of daycare. Her reluctance to engage in play may mean that she does not even know what it means 'to play'. Such responsibilities are reflective of Indigenous values are contrary to being raised with 'indifference' as Patsy explains. The entire family contributes to the care of the younger children.

**5.2.3 South: *I was emotionally smart, so I was like a loose cannon going everywhere and nowhere at the same time.* ~ Patsy**

**Fire**

*I was really angry. The whole time I was trying to block out the flashbacks and memories and it didn't seem to be working. I was carrying around weapons – knives – walking the streets looking for a person to kill. I was so angry that I wanted to kill somebody. I walked around streets at night in the rain looking for someone who would look at me the wrong way or say the wrong thing – just kinda – an excuse to kill them.*

~ Gerry (Present Member, December 6, 2010)

Fire represents emotions of passion and tension embodied within participants' stories. These stories must be shared with others so that the participant can digest, understand and come to terms with them. Like passion, it is often difficult to contain fire; even with little fuel it is able to engulf an object in flames. Lee (2000) views fire in this way:

The consuming nature of fire also draws us into its realm. Our feelings are heightened by a warm bonfire, feelings we do not have for an electric heater, as practical as it may be. Some say it is because our nature and that of fire are the same—destructive when uncontrolled, beneficial when ordered and mesmerizing at all times (p. 44)

Fire operates in a snowballing effect driving WAVS members towards wellness. It can also be seen as a constructive tool used frequently among Indigenous peoples throughout the world to burn the undergrowth to pave a healthier path for new forest growth. This element is also used in the 'slash and burn' method of agriculture where vegetation is cut down and then any remaining foliage is burned. Ashes fertilize the soil in the next round of crops. After the first cycle of crops is planted and harvested the land must then be left alone and for healing and regeneration. Like these fires, shifting roles between researcher and participant can become reciprocal storywork. While seeking to learn more about the members who attend WAVS I spontaneously ask Patrick,



*Our stories are very personal and I sometimes think, 'Why am I asking you that question?' What does that have to do with Warriors Against Violence?' Do you see those connections too or do you think when I ask some things, 'they're just off the wall?'*

He supports my spontaneous reflection: *All your questions are valid. I feel that I'm connected to Warriors, so all the questions you're asking are connected in a unique way. They have a unique way of being connected to me being a part of [this study].* (February 16, 2011)

When Patrick speaks earlier of being *this rebellious person* with regard to his feelings and emotions he reflects upon his time as trapped within fire and emotion. Fire may represent the rebellious side of him that ignites when he feels wounded by others. He recognizes the commonalities between how his actions hurt another and how the actions of others pain him and lead him to develop empathetic feelings. It is as if empathy modeled at Warriors symbolizes waters of cessation for flames of misunderstanding and rebellion.

### ***Racism***

Racism is one form of anger that can be outwardly expressed. David shares a poignant perspective about coping with racism: *I get along with everyone as long as they're human, as long as they have respect* (February 28, 2010). Patrick recognizes his own racist epithets as rooted in his being on the receiving end of racism. As he comes to realize the pain he feels resulting from the actions of others and is more aware now, that he has a choice in how he conducts himself moving forward. Although he may not yet be where he wants he is now on the path towards healing. Alternatively, Michael is farther along in his healing and exhibits sounder convictions. After sharing with me his youth-hood embarrassment of his *Indian* father, Michael talks more about witnessing racism:

*Oh, I've had friends of mine where something would happen, and it's like they go to a different place and they're calling [someone] 'Whitey' and I'm like, 'Holy Shit, where is this coming from? You're a peer in the community and you're talking like this?' But it's because we all feel this injustice, right? It's*

*never far away and it's just ... trying to move past that and do good things but it's still there, right?* (December 9, 2010)

Healing involves passionately challenging one another. Even role models within the community such as Michael's comrades are vulnerable to thoughts of racism, which sheds light on how close these issues are to systemic surfaces of attitudes and verbal contexts.

Patsy admits to having internalized racism: *I'm just so used to being insulted since the first time being called 'Indian'. I've always taken it in. I'm just so used to it, it's like water off my back now* (December 17, 2010). Since my physical pain is so much more than placid 'water off a duck's back' I am left to wonder if the same is for Patsy's normalized racism. Her social conditioning has left a literal dark spot on her that resurfaces discursively from time to time, reminding her of her inferiority on the basis of her 'Indian-ness'. In childhood she learned that racism could be expressed as a double standard. She was lectured for being racist and calling the children White but the White children were not reprimanded for calling her an Indian. This internalized racism reflects the fire that seems to have surrounded her from all sides until it had no place to go but to her very core. Today racism is no longer a stranger but exists as a part of her Sacred-self.

It seems that M.'s early experiences with White people, as Patsy and Michael also identify, were negative because she witnessed the ways in which non-Aboriginal people poorly treated someone she clearly loved. Interestingly, she does not say her grandfather hated White people but rather, disliked the way they treated him while conducting business. That is, he focused on their behavior and expression of racism, rather than on their character traits. This may be the source of her internalized distrust for non-Aboriginal people as is apparent in her tireless struggle with White authority figures and structures at work among her First Nations co-workers. Her challenges almost seem emancipatory. In striving to break free of the structural racism apparent in her workplace she does so with her grandfather in mind. Her authority figure at work feels threatened by M.'s knowledge and reinforces the prejudice that employed Aboriginal peoples are still uneducated and therefore, should fill only the lowest paying positions. Those with knowledge hold the key to power. In a workplace, as M. experiences, the power differential is expressed as racism as we struggle with ir/rationalities in our conversation below.

*I haven't figured out how to ask this elegantly yet. Um, is your advisor of a different ethnicity? A White woman?*

*Yeah. I think she's Swedish. And the other lady, she's English. ... See, I had a really good time at that job until 2005 when they came in. Until then, all the bosses I had were so much fun. And they really, really acknowledged whatever I had to share with them. And appreciated it. They appreciated the bridges I made between the workplace and the people, you know? The clients, who are all Native, and um, I reminded them if you want to be able to talk to people, you've got to be able to put yourself in their place. And imagine what it takes for them to pick up the phone and ask for help. You've got to treat them with extra consideration and listen to them and talk to them. They're not there to rip you off or anything like that they're just – they need help. I mean that's why the service exists because they need it. They're not the enemy.*

*So, your clients are mostly Indigenous.*

*All of them.*

*And yet the very program, the foundation above you, is guided by European people.*

*All the Natives that are in that office are given the lowest jobs. And all the ones that are not Native, you know, they're – she acts as if they're just so special. Like, they're so smart and they're so educated and they're so capable. (March 3, 2011)*

M. and I toil through our vignette of workplace racism. We touch on systemic racism, dominant rule, patronizing attitudes and lack of inter-cultural respect and understanding. Fortunately, M. also reports that since her stress-related illness, *I've been sticking up for myself ... when I had that stroke and almost died, I thought, 'I'm not going to let these people kill me'* (March 3, 2011).

## ***Residential Schooling***

Although Gerry does not reveal to me that he or any of his family members attended residential schools, he does share his subjective perspectives about the system's colonial aftermath. With many children dying from disease; denied lack of healthcare at the hands of some administrators; and many more as victims of emotional, physical and sexual abuse, those who emerged from this trauma alive are considered survivors. The Canadian government presently believes that the way towards healing is to compensate them for their hardship. Gerry surmises the funds represent a severe lack of awareness about exactly what had occurred behind closed doors within those institutions. I sense from Gerry's emphatic storywork that he believes if the government takes a step back and sees the bigger picture, it could realize that monetary compensation alone is futile. To him the monetary action exacerbates the situation. He feels that monies are diverted to fuel substance abuse and alcohol addiction, rather than to programs that could better alleviate suffering. The Legacy of Hope Foundation's website (2012) succinctly describes:

From the early 1830s to 1996, thousands of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children were forced to attend residential schools in an attempt to assimilate them into the dominant culture. Those children suffered abuses of the mind, body, emotions and spirit that can be almost unimaginable. Over 150,000 children, some as young as 4-years old, attended the government-funded and church-run residential schools. It is estimated that there are 80,000 residential school Survivors alive today.

Patrick's experience in the residential school system *feels like a lifetime* (December 8, 2010). Although only there for five years, he reflects the subjective nature of time itself. Time can feel like it moves forward in slow motion or comes to a stand still during moments of torture. Conversely, time can wildly spin forward and seemingly out of control when one is enjoying the moment. The abuse Patrick survived under the governance of residential school officials feeds his anger and his lack of control. To a greater degree it also affects his present-day innocence and impacts his ability to create and maintain healthy relationships

with other people. Donna voices her tumultuous understandings of his healing within the context of their on-going relationship:

*It's very terrifying for him. Need I say, we're having monumental problems. ... But it's really going quite well; I'm really rather optimistic. But it's huge work for him because of the trauma, right and he's still messed up, like, he didn't even think he was doing anything wrong. ... That hey, it's not okay to scream and yell at someone; hey, it's not okay to take dishes and break them on the wall; hey, it's not okay to go out and seduce women and tell them [you're] a 'medicine man.'* (December 3, 2010)

Awakening, as terrifying a process it can be, takes time and patience. I have heard it said, 'time is not our enemy—impatience is'. To conceive 166 years of so-called education across eight generations at the hands of governmental colonialists, it is likely that all affected participants in this study will not experience a completely peaceful state of mind in their lifetime. Nevertheless, as the Legacy of Hope Foundation (2012) also supports and locally reports,

Today, healing initiatives are taking place in every region of the country, in cities and small towns, on reserves and in rural, remote and isolated communities. Sharing circles, healing circles, smudging, Sundances, the Potlatch, Pow-wows and many other ceremonies have been revived in the last few decades, providing a multiplicity of positive models not only for healing but for people to reconnect with their cultural roots. Reconnecting with culture provides an empowering focus in life. People who have a strong sense of their culture have a strong sense of self.

When discussing the residential school system's repercussions, White Owl contemplates the reality of the situation. For healing to occur it needs to take place not only within each person and as part of a community but also within our entire nation. He sees that the effects of complex trauma continue to haunt Aboriginal peoples a full century and a half later. First peoples around the world who have undergone abuse and torture under other horrific circumstances, whether they be slavery, war or genocide, still endure the

physiological pain born of the abuse and trauma experienced by their parents and grandparents. Melanie attests to this circumstance as our conversation winds down and I ask,

*Are there questions I didn't ask or where perhaps I should not have asked?*

*She emphasizes, The only thing is, it's really important that it's known about my mom being in residential school and me being an inter-generational survivor and just not being able to identify with that and being constantly berated. Warriors Against Violence teaches me it takes consistency to take care of me. (March 10, 2011)*

Melanie's imperative is an emotional reminder that her mother, like she today, was a hostage to oppressive circumstances. The care that Warriors imparts to heal is vitally necessary to break contemporary cycles of miscarried education, violence and justice.

David speaks of residential schools like a prison, a place of *injustice* to which one is 'sentenced'. The way he alludes to 'doing time' and how it taught him and others not to trust anyone is familiar to the way one must quickly learn in prison who and who not to trust. However, his sentence is extended to include time done in real prison, the CSC. His words spell remorse, yet David behaves exactly as he was trained to do since age 5. Some of the world's best athletes like Tiger Woods or Clara Hughes begin crafting their skills around that same age. Ironically, these are harmless games the athletes engage in but the game of fighting in which David is encouraged to participate puts him, his family and his community members in danger. People incarcerated within the prison system are predominately older youth and adults; yet in the case of mandatory residential schools, innocent children were sentenced to the institutions despite having committed no crime. They are relegated to having no listener to their stories during and after their 'time inside' unless they find intervention like WAVS' traditional circle model. This study's cornerstone is that I as researcher listen to the participants' experience and offer an opportunity for my readers to do the same. "The very potential for transformation at work ..." says the Dalai Lama (2009), "is a sign of the fundamental reciprocity of life" (p. 90). Ways of healing can be considered positive reciprocity; the aftermath of Canada's residential school system cannot.

More often than not people speak of 15 minutes of fame, not of destruction. M.'s story certainly highlights the latter—all it took was first 15 minutes as a scared child taken

from her grandparents and deposited into one of Canada's eventual 130 residential schools (CBC News Canada, 2012) to forever destroy her. Such a fate seems to be at the center of her tenacious spirit and highlights how children can be conditioned to believe that violence is a way of life. To make matters worse, the external transformation during that single year of residential schooling has formed repercussions throughout M.'s life. Even a short time-span, compared to that of other participants, was enough to isolate her from the community. Upon exiting the school, she found that her external appearance had become foreign to her community members back home and equally, the colonially-imposed internal transformation made her incompatible with her community's traditional ways of being. M. now fits in nowhere, as she acknowledges the mutual sense of her non-belonging in her home community.

### ***Incarceration***

During my investigation of CSC's Aboriginal inmate programs, I surmise that someone like myself, not having experienced punitive incarceration, might assume that 'not much' is happening in jail in terms of inmates' emotional and social development. However, White Owl teaches me that life, inclusive of prison experiences, is part of education, about learning how to speak with people and how to get along with one another. This has led me to ask, does oppression ultimately become an agreement? By one party or both? And, are both satisfied?

Early on, First Nations children were stunned by their experiences in residential school. Later on in life, however, some accept patterns of crime, violence, substance abuse and imprisonment became 'just the way the world works.' White Owl points out that prisons are larger versions of the same residential institutions. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that those who are brought up within the residential school environment eventually make their way into penitentiaries due to deviant ways of behaviour they developed to survive such school settings.

Hearing from David that his uncles taught him to fight as a child, I recalled another fighter who has also lived in and out of jail. Some of David's experiences parallel the life of the infamous professional boxer, Mike Tyson, who grew up as a street youth and led a tumultuous life. Despite being institutionalized numerous times, Tyson achieved career success as the world's youngest heavy-weight boxing champion and some of his words parallel accounts that Patrick, White Owl and David relay:

I'm really lost but I'm trying to find myself. ... I just want to escape. ... I'm just a dark guy from a den of iniquity. A dark shadowy figure from the bowels of iniquity. I wish I could be Mike who gets an endorsement deal. But you can't make a lie and a truth go together. ... My mission is to go out there and destroy and not to let anything get involved. You get punched, you get hurt, I refused to be hurt, knocked down or knocked out. I can't lose. I refuse to lose! ... This country wasn't built on moral fiber. This country was built on rape, slavery, murder, degradation and affiliation with crime. ... I lost my soul as a human being. I lost my self-respect. I'm not a lovable guy, so it's really not hard for people to dislike me. ... If they lock me up, at least I'll have a place to stay. (Mike Tyson Biography, 2011)

Similarly, at 55 years of age, David has literally had his life taken from him: he spent 46 years in a state-controlled facility, with freedom only during the past four years and the first five years of his childhood. In Canada, this is equivalent to almost two life-sentences of 25 years. After 46 years of state control and incarceration, how can society expect a model citizen? David exemplifies how numerous Aboriginal men like him were/are taught ideologies of self-loathing. Low self-worth, demonstrated in Tyson's stark words above, is a likely contributor to substance dependency, a way to numb the pain of self-hatred and to escape the demons released by government authorities in the form of institutionalized racism.

To make matters worse, I learn from Leslie, his strong perception that CSC continues to destroy lives just to keep people employed. The high numbers of Aboriginal people imprisoned in the Canadian prison system is a direct result of the system demanding to maintain those high levels because it puts 'bread and butter' on their employees' tables. He explains,

*You have prison guards in there that rely on their low skill set. They're not going to come out of prison and be psychologists or be anything else outside of there. They're used to walk[ing] around with keys, jingling keys, putting them in a lock. Walking you to wherever you're supposed to be. They're very well versed in crowd control. Yeah, so the prison staff -- it is in their best interest because they've got children, they've got wives, they have to put their*



*children through school and they have to put food on their table. It's in their best interests to keep the prison filled with people.* (December 1, 2010)

Leslie uses a 'power-over-others' sensorial imagery. His words register a profound sound of metal pieces jingling together—not the pleasant jingling of bells associated with Christmas songs, Salvation Army donation collectors or Indigenous traditional jingle-dress dancers—but the jingling of a heavy collection of keys that precede the sound of doors slamming and locking. From Leavenworth Penitentiary, Peltier (1997) writes about institutional sounds.

I suppose the outside world is noisy most of the time, too but in here every sound is magnified in your mind. The ventilation system roars and rumbles and hisses. Nameless cranks and creakings, flushings and gurglings sound within walls. Buzzers and bells grate at your nerves. Disembodied, often unintelligible voices groan and squawk on load speakers. Steel doors are forever grinding and slamming, then grinding and slamming again. There's an ever-present background chorus of shouts and yells and calls, demented babblings, crazed screams, ghostlike laughter. Maybe one day you realize one of those voices is your own and then you really begin to worry. (p. 6)

The system whereby Aboriginal peoples are encouraged to remain within the cycle of institutionalization is directly tied to a practice that legal authorities are encouraged to enforce. With a grade 10 education when he entered prison, in addition to first year university courses and four different vocational trade tickets by the time he left the system for good, Leslie is able to take a step back and see the system for what it is, to use it for his own educational betterment and to seek a way out of it via a healthier life pattern.

Institutions for Indigenous peoples are frequently one-way and uni-directional. Many inmates arrive with no intention or opportunity—by their offenses, behaviour and the systemic control above them—of exiting the system. Between prisoners, guards and wardens, one's societal failure is too often another's success. In fact, Leslie uses this systemic, forced isolation to awaken his spirit; this is seen in stark contrast to many others where isolation is an agonizing process. In this respect, the fire of the South Dimension can be seen in a positive light, as kindling a flame of curiosity and motivation enough to sustain an interest in feeding

his soul with new information. Can isolation be shifted for others? Leslie mentors that it is possible, if others can find and engage in an activity that is intrinsically interesting and it can act as a release from the deficit-based system in which they presently exist.

Of paramount concern is that while Aboriginal people represent only 4% of the adult population in Canada, they account for 24% of adult admissions to provincial/territorial custody and 18% of admissions to federal custody (Adult Custody and Criminal Services in Canada, 2012). Upon release from CSC, Aboriginal Individuals and families face a maelstrom of barriers to healthier living: greater depths of severe oppression; discrimination; education and employment limitations; poverty; and societally-imposed isolation. Gregory Cajeté (2000) reminds us that being torn between “different ways of living and looking at life is a place of great confusion but it can also be a place of great compassion and clarity” (p. 189). Were we to consider a strictly financial standpoint, in 2004/2005 the cost of incarcerating a single federal prisoner was \$259.05 per day and the alternative cost of community supervision ranged from \$5-\$25 per person per day (Department of Justice, 2006). While these figures represent the stark disproportionate overrepresentation of incarcerated Aboriginal adults within CSC, even more disturbing are the proportion of Aboriginal youth who are simultaneously incarcerated at this time. The 2006 Census informs us that Aboriginal youth represent 6% of the youth population, 12- to 17-years old in Canada, yet account for 31% of youth admissions to sentenced custody (Youth Custody and Criminal Services in Canada, 2010).

## Emotion

*I let it hit me big time I become emotional with it then it peaks. It becomes ... my weaknesses start to act out. I tend to get grumpy a lot. I tend to get ... my thinking starts to get distorted. I start to break down.*

~ Patrick (Present Member, February 16, 2011)

The most common form of emotional abuse, 53%, reported by victims is being put down or called names by their partner to make them feel bad. Other manifestations of emotional abuse include: having their partner not wanting them to talk to others, having their partner demand to know where they were at all times and having their partner trying to limit their contact with family and friends (Family Violence in Canada, 2009). Persistent relocation during childhood and instability of home and family, as in the case of Terry's parents who

struggled with alcoholism and a transient household, seem significant sources of fear masked as anger for him. To make matters worse, when the journey of 'rotating homes' seemed to end, a new cycle of abuse emerged. Stuart, a sharing circle participant, outlines his feelings of shame and disconnect:

*I was ashamed, in a way, to be First Nations. I grew up in the system, [Ministry of Child and Family Development]. I went through a lot of foster homes and I found my adopted family there, who accepted me as one of their own. Which is Daniel and Gail Parker. I've been living with them since I was eleven. But there was, I guess, sort of like attachment [problems and mis] trust with people and it took me a long time to feel really comfortable with them. (February 1, 2011)*

Terry, too, articulates the impact on his youth, of a family in distress.

*I was blaming a lot towards my parents and you know, I didn't know why I was behaving the way I was and also I was stuck in an addiction, too, smoking marijuana. I'm 37 now, as I was getting older I was blaming others and blaming the world that everybody owes me. Why should I conform to this if everybody owes me?*

I probe him for a better understanding, one that apparently eludes him also. *What do they owe you, Terry? At that time of resistance, were you able to define the word 'owes'?*

*That was the thing. I didn't know what everybody owed me at that time. (March 16, 2011)*

The notion of being 'owed' is thought-provoking, particularly when it refers to emotional debt. Can it ever be paid back? How? Where? When? And who would pay it back? This concept of being owed for pain incurred in childhood implies a sense of blame. Often the burden of emotional suffering is so great that moving through it almost requires blame, at least initially. Even in the act of blame, there will almost always exist a barrier, a defense mechanism in place that prevents one from pushing that ownership onto others. Consider Terry's situation;

it is entirely understandable that cultural teachings could not be passed to him when his family was in disarray and he, himself, disoriented. He mentions that an explanation is all that is needed but it remains to be seen whether his parents could ever offer that. Some of the actions that we engage in are incomprehensible at the time of occurrence, as if done automatically. Unless families become aware of the impact of a member's actions on another, they may not even be able to approach that point. I mirror to Terry the paradox I see in his journey towards health:

*Yet, when you're in that addiction, I would imagine you cannot possibly articulate why or even what they owe you. You want people living in addiction to answer you. That must have been a real struggle.*

*He iterates his progression: I quit alcohol and I used marijuana for a substitute to keep everything still suppressed. Bottled up and I had no outlet until I went to explode—it's not being able to control my feelings anymore or identify my emotions because there was so much built up and suppressed.*

(March 16, 2011)

In Terry's situation, emotional compensation seems to have failed, with alcohol and marijuana being used as replacements for true healing, analogous to 'fire being fought by fire'. Without the educational support he has found at Warriors, the only end to which his experience can lead is to an uncontrollable self-raging inferno.

Leslie, perhaps a few stages ahead of Terry in his own healing journey, tells me, *I'm deeply affected by the opportunity to disclose, by the opportunity to continue my healing journey, by the opportunity to support and further other people's healing journeys*

(December 1, 2010). WAVS facilitators discern and disclose as appropriate, their collective wisdom but they also gain from the experience by continuing on their own paths towards healing. This is unsurprising, as there are situations where the listener may have nothing to offer but a receptive ear and heart. Within inter-connective storywork, the listener may gain as much from the story as the storyteller gets from sharing. Thus, the success of WAVS can be attributed to this interaction between the storyteller as listener and the listener as storyteller. I demonstrate this reversal continuum by being open to the knowledge that participants and I naturally exchange roles throughout our study, whereby they sometimes become the researcher, just as I sometimes become the participant. Each conversation,

each journey is an opportunity. For WAVS members sharing their personal stories of family violence, their subsequent paths to understand and their struggle to make meaning, the healing progress lends an additional opportunity for Leslie, other co-facilitators and each of the other WAVS circle members to take another positive step forward.

We must acknowledge the prejudices and biases we hold about others and ourselves before being able to move beyond them. Healing also involves listening, not just to others but also to oneself and becoming aware of our inner and spoken thoughts as one listens to another person. After visiting with Michael I write,

*I do not feel that he is asking me, 'Right?' for confirmation of his thoughts. I think his use of this word confirms that he assumes I do understand him, as in his earlier phrase, 'Do you understand that?' However, this begs the question, when other participants use the very same word, do they mean the same thing? It then becomes a matter of context; a word's meaning may depend on the individual, the experience and the knowledge shared between us. (December 9, 2010)*

Since we can't read others' minds or know all the time what they mean by a particular word, it becomes all the more necessary for us to use, in conversation, non-verbal gestures that demonstrate our understanding, empathy, even the absence of anger. Michael shows an understanding that anger is like fire—a small flame that has the capacity to consume all else and become a raging inferno. Being aware of the flame while it is still kindling allows one to exert control over it by removing the fuel and extinguishing the fire. However, if left to its own accord, it may erupt into an uncontrollable blaze destroying everything in its path, until it is exhausted of fuel and is forced into dormancy again.

I use the word 'dormancy' rather than 'extinction' in recognition of the fact that for some trauma, there can never be total healing from emotional pain and anger because of the fragility of wounds and scars prone to being re/opened. With M. in mind, what meaning might 15 years of an event hold—especially when it only takes 15 minutes of sacred-self ruination? Comparatively, it may take more time for some of us to walk to our nearest coffee house and within that very same time frame, M's life as she once knew it is lost forever. Resentment over injustice cannot wholly disappear. When she was forcefully separated from her younger brother on the first day of residential school her attempts to struggle against the separation resulted in verbal abuse and beatings. For many Aboriginal children, being

prohibited from caring for siblings is highly counterintuitive. Therefore, M. may have learned to enact aggression in an attempt to fulfill her familial responsibility. Additionally, the recurring tendency towards violence was M.'s protective mechanism against physical and sexual abuse—it is difficult to be harmed if you are the one who harms first. The violence M. so often relied on as her first line of defense prevented others from inflicting physical, sexual or emotional harm upon her.

## Youth

*I go in there as a friend – as a person who will listen to them. I have the same experience [as some youth] and I hope they understand and come to us and know that ‘We will not judge you, we will not harm you, ridicule you or talk to you in a cumbersome way.’*

~ Ryan (WAVS Youth Leader, January 10, 2011)

In Ryan's discussion about the Warriors' youth he mentors, he tells of multiple ways in which they bond as a cohesive group of urban Aboriginal youth coping with family households, like Terry's, whereby violence is likely the norm. Ryan's portrayal of loyalty takes on the characteristics of protection, of people looking out for one another, their vested interest manifests even in the simplest of actions. As Ryan declares about their group night routine in which the youth do not part once the meeting ends but wait for each other to use the washroom and then walk together to the transit station: *We all do that [we] wait for one another* (March 18, 2011). This statement seems to describe safety in numbers and protection from unknown elements, as traveling in a group offers security and strongly embodies belonging. Youth group members ensure that no one feels left out as they casually depart for the evening while someone is still in the washroom.

The primary goal on which Ryan's leadership rests is that of trust. This holds true for both the youths' nonverbal actions and their verbal dialogues:

*I always tell them we are trying to establish trust. We are trying to build friendships with one another, so if I can allow that them to talk to one another, then they can trust me and learn from what I might have to say. [As a result] I might have more of a voice to influence them.* (March 18, 2011)

Trust-building involves more components than may be attributed to loyalty such as hearing each other's respective issues and jointly imagining solutions. Trust is built on following through with one's promise so others can learn dependability of support. Ryan describes it as a process of opening up, even sometimes leading to disagreement as a necessary foundation for getting to know others.

*Some of those relationships with each other are being established but now some [youth] are actually arguing with one another [about] issues arising. The relationships are building, they are talking more, disclosing to one another. And just like in any normal relationship, disagreements happen; in any group setting they can happen. Now, what they work towards, hopefully is, they can put the WAVS tools in place, to learn and practice them. (March 18, 2011)*

Ryan understands that building relationships can mean working with a precarious foundation. In order to stabilize a foundation, patience is required. Disagreements need to take place and through the mending of those disagreements, the youth learn more about one another as some relationships strengthen into close friendships. It is through these experiences that the youth can put their WAVS tools of understanding, communication, violence intervention and safety to best use, all while collaboratively, supportively keeping future goals in mind.

As well as learning about their Indigenous culture through storytelling and sharing circles, these youth are also creators of their own culture. The notion of youth initiating culture is noteworthy because it may implicitly imply they had little, if any, sense of culture prior to joining their youth group. Subsequently, does this mean their culture was simply dormant in them? If culture is, for simplicity's sake, an experience—entailing attitudes, behaviours and consequent knowledge—how might an experience be dormant inside someone? Does it lie waiting to be experienced? According to Aboriginal-ancestral interconnectedness, the answer is yes. I ask Ryan, *What is the impact you are witnessing? I mean, what are you seeing from the youth as they engage in their culture?* His response that the youth are *intrigued* shows me that in contemporary times, curiosity is a motivator to engage youth in Aboriginal cultural/spiritual practices. They appear aware that culturally-relevant healing and protection rituals like smudging/cleansing have a revitalizing effect on their wellbeing as they enter adulthood and seek refuge from difficult home-lives.

#### **5.2.4 West: *I feel peaceful and strong and like I have so much to share.* ~ M.**

##### **Physical**

*It's going backwards, you know because everyone is getting sick. There are even people dying as a result of it [the workplace racism].*

~ M. (Former Member, March 3, 2011)

In chapter 4 I discuss the participant-driven theme of shelters as key physical importance. In this chapter 5 section participant discussions now focus on dis-ease as a physical and/or physiological matter. If racism were a disease, our possible resistance to it reminds me of the attitude my friend has had towards his disease since he was diagnosed with Human Immune-deficiency Virus (HIV) over 25 years ago. He has made an 'agreement' that the virus and he cohabit in the same body for as long as necessary, an 'if you don't bother me I won't bother you' relationship. Conventionally, diseases are defined as disorders of structure or function in a living organism that give rise to specific symptoms or affect a distinct area. The state of dis-ease describes the same disorder of structure or function existing within a living community—again giving rise to specific symptoms and affecting distinct areas of daily functioning. For example, M. exemplifies how the dis-ease of racism results in unhealthy work environments.

*As a matter of fact, I became very ill and ended up with a stroke as a result of [the racism] because I don't take anybody being violent towards me. I stick up for myself and at first I didn't know how to associate, how to internalize it and so that was the cause of me getting sick; I internalized everything. (March 3, 2011)*

Colonial workforce policies give rise to conflicting and confused roles of the self, which, given the interrelatedness of the total person lead to M.'s physical illness. Sound anti-racist policies may need to be instilled/enforced because of simple ignorance and lack of knowledge or because outdated and/or non-existing policies and practice fail to be articulated in the best interests of the people for whom they are intended. From another perspective they may be a result of more insidious intent to practice blatant racism by



constructing a framework that endorses and reinforces systemic, structural violence (Hill [Lester-Smith] and Kurtz, 2008). M. continues,

*Until then [before my present supervisor], all the bosses I had were so much fun. And they really, really acknowledged whatever I had to share with them. And appreciated it. They appreciated the bridges I made between the workplace and the people, you know? The members, who are all Native, and um, I reminded [my bosses] if you want to be able to talk to people, you've got to be able to put yourself in their place. (March 3, 2011)*

Joe, too, shares about social dis-ease in his efforts to make the WAVS philosophy more widely known:

*Dan and me have been in different places [meetings and conferences] and when we get up and address the communities, some of the men will yell out that we're 'born again Indians'. It's, uh, quite common because they're [audience members] afraid to admit it, we're taking it back to the way it [pre-colonial violence and cultural healing] was meant to be and they're afraid of it. They don't know why or what they're going to have to feel for themselves. (December 15, 2010)*

As they reach out to educate the communities, the co-founders experience lateral violence from skeptical community members in the form of name-calling that act out their fears of the unknown. In this way a purging of emotions occurs in the form of verbal insults before healing can take place. Curiously, the men use terminology that is similar to the Western cliché 'Born-again Christians', a less than positive perception that implies zealous and evangelical advocacy, analogous to the work in which Fossella and Parker have been engaged.

In addition to doubt raised by the people they try to help, WAVS facilitators face government-induced fiscal oppression. Joyce explains. *We haven't got the dollars or staff to actually go out and do a follow up for anyone from the program or anyone who've got their children but you know, it's been thirteen years [and we are still open]* (December 15, 2010). This conversation reflects a paradoxical situation—WAVS lacks the funding needed in order to generate up-to-date statistics of program outcomes that would demonstrate the program

efficacy needed to obtain more funding. Though deserving of more funding in order to continue providing the transformative services they offer, regrettably, the organization demonstrates the vicious cycle experienced by many community therapeutic programs.

## **Water**

*I recognized that I had that kind of ability to ripple communities and society at large. I had that ability to ripple it and the consequence for me is that I'm suffering it now*

~ Patrick (Present Member, December 8, 2010)

While in attendance at the 2010 “Healing our Spirits Worldwide” conference in Hawaii, I listened to a traditional host explaining Hawaiian water. It flows from deep below the Earth’s surface and takes a long, long time, whether it’s hours, months or years to rise to the surface. And what we are doing is drinking our ancestral water, the goodness and purity of our ancestral waters. The water that we think is so fresh arrives from so deep within the Earth’s core. No matter its depths the strengths of water, literally or metaphorically speaking, are abundant. But water is also volatile and vulnerable—it can succumb to changes in the tide. As a definitional component of the sea water is a cyclical element that begins with one drop of rain but binds and combines with other drops to produce ever-expansive bodies of water from a puddle, pool or pond, to a lake, sea or ocean. Its transient nature is evident in creeks, rivers and waterfalls. Yet even within stagnant pools of water, movement and change or relations and adaptations still occur like the chemical states of water from steam to liquid to solid form. Water has been continually used as a metaphor in Aboriginal storytelling but is especially appropriate for Coast Salish peoples given their dependence on water for their way of life. Water is an integral element in our living environment as part of the inclusive approach to self-health and healing. It nourishes not only flora and fauna but also humans who rely on it for daily sustenance. Paramount to seas of change self-healing does not occur in a vacuum. Because of the interrelatedness of people and the multi-directional influences of any one person on another, the healing that one WAVS member experiences can make a distinguished impression on another. A ‘sea of change’ can mean inter-national change as seen in the waters of many seas across the world during seemingly gentle or harsh weather conditions. The metaphor can also be downsized to ‘a pond of change’, which can mean local change within a family and an extended community.

## Adults

*Nowadays you have parents who don't know how to be parents. You have grandparents that don't know how to be grandparents. Even some of our leaders are still lost.*

~ White Owl (Present Member, December 9, 2010)

White Owl informs us of the cyclical law of mutual care and responsibility inherent in Indigenous values and how its fracture can lead to the destruction of the nations; *it's really damaged our nation* (December 9, 2010). Not following our ancestral way of life as a law of respect, often referred to as God's, the Creator's or Nature's Law, can lead to a fragmentation of culture and ways of being. This in turn disrupts the roles of parents, Elders and role models. Each who occupies such a role may lack the requisite knowledge, experience and guidance. White Owl infers that with patient honesty and speaking our truths healing can happen.

Physical and emotional healing processes for many First Nations adults are multifaceted, as Terry explains:

*It's the inter-generational transmission syndrome that's passed from family to family, you know and if I knew then what I [voice trails off]. Every answer brings meaning and every choice brings meaning to where I am now, so I'm thankful for what happened in my life, which brings me to sitting with you right now.* (March 16, 2011)

Contemporary healing practices include making others aware of honouring all life with respect for self, others, environment and living in harmonious balance. Some Aboriginal families are being torn apart by violence and typical decisions and behaviours. Their culture has been pushed aside with disdain. Bridging the gap between ancestral wisdom and present-day healing practices in the ways that WAVS does is vital for urban Aboriginal peoples for generations to come. This kind of interconnectedness is widely lived. In Coast Salish tradition when joining hands in a prayer circle we hold our left hand palm-up to Father Sky and our right one down to Mother Earth. I recall these spiritual teachings from Roberta at this moment because in this section the adult participants share about their childhood and youth experiences. In other words, participants look backward upon themselves and other family members while also forward towards theirs, their children's and their grandchildren's

healthy futures. In the sharing circle component of the study, Roberta speaks of why she volunteers on as many Aboriginal-focused health committees as she is able. *The truth is, I am not there for them [the researchers]. I am there for my children and my grandchildren* (February 1, 2011).

The power of generational instability can perpetuate a lack of logic in one's life-long functioning as Gail illuminates below. Recalling that her grandmother almost set their house on fire to escape her abusive husband with her children still inside, a second memory surfaces:

*One day my cousin was talking to me and he said, 'We always felt so bad when Uncle [#1] and Uncle [#2] got into that fight and Uncle [#3] got in there and stabbed Uncle [#2] and you were covered in blood and I remember taking your shirt off and throwing it in the fireplace.'* (December 9, 2010)

The combined content and run-on style of storywork that Gail uses beckons concern from the onset. She continues, *I'll just tell you this little piece:*

*My daughter had an anxiety attack -- I mean we didn't know that was what it was but I kind of thought but we thought, 'No, she's having a heart attack' right? And we took her to the hospital and she was talking to the psychiatrist and he said, 'Did you ever witness violence or was there violence in the home?' And she said, 'Well, my grandma shot my grandpa's leg off.'* (March 3, 2011)

What is the impact of this kind of experience on a child? Would it equate to the trauma of being a child of war? If not military war then what of familial warfare? Intergenerational violence has an immense impact on our sacred selves. It creates a health pandemic in communities and families and leads to severe physical and emotional suffering that is as contagious as an airborne disease. Healing transformation involves building a set of positive sensory associations rather than negative ones when relating to other people. The ways in which David, Ryan, Michael and Freda all work with youth in both paid and volunteer capacities model positive overtones. Education that takes stock of past and present environments frequently leads to restoration of health.

Donna confirms that awakening to an alternative, healthier future can be both a fearful and a courageous place to be but that a genesis of awareness affirms the need for us to consider each other in context with respect to our backgrounds and histories. If not, we are unintentionally seeing others as distinct from their experiences as children and youth. In sharing the context in which she and Patrick first met she enters not only a beginning phase of personal awakening, but also an awareness of another—Patrick as a self-reported Shaman and his *mysterious Native ways*. Describing hers and Patrick's relationship, again she offers,

*The fact that I was co-dependent, that I felt I could save him, that all came into play. He's my buddy -- he's my friend. I love him. There's some happiness in that place. But we're not out of the woods yet. (December 3, 2010)*

Acceptance of their confounding relationship despite what he does to harm himself which she says also hurts her means Donna has begun taking responsibility for her own dependencies, beginning with an open acknowledgement:

*I'm certainly not an expert and I certainly don't want to present myself in that way but because of my struggles with a lot of issues like alcoholism, separation, severe depression and anxiety, I really milked the Vancouver community for what's available. ... I've taken extensive workshops dealing with trauma and recovery from abuse, a six week program which dealt with healing from abusive relationships, I've been in counseling and groups for a long, long time.*

*I hear you saying you've been through all those programs. Is there a kind of void in there? I mean, you've said that although you've done all those, Warriors is different?*

*Yeah, it kind of does. I think the thing with healing, for me, is that it's like a quilt, you know, a patchwork quilt. You take it here, you take it there. I mean when I look at my healing quilt there's counseling, there's Warriors. ... It's very complicated and each one of those sections has contributed different*

*things. But I would have to say that the Aboriginal theme for me has been very, um, what's the right word? Very moving. Very deeply affecting.*  
(December 3, 2010)

A 'healing quilt' may be an interesting metaphor/theoretical framework for Donna and other Non-First Nations peoples. It shows that there is wealth in a variety of people, experiences and stories, something highly valued at WAVS. Healthy relationships are built on rituals like the ones she and Patrick share each morning. Not ones of religious or cultish practices—but of trusted routines and daily patterns of healthy attitudes and actions with ourselves and with others. Further research could focus on how these healthy patterns of thought and behaviour are established to combat the long-term impact of traumatic episodes.

Another aspect of healing involves using the existing system in a positive light, something Leslie learned to do during his incarceration. From his adult perspective he looks back and offers me an example of learning from the dominant system. We discuss the matter of 'control':

*I'm struck by your evolving 'no' control—'now' control, Leslie. At what point did your ability to take control arise?*

*I think you can almost find a moment in my life where there was a light switch. ... that need to have a lot more input into my personal development. Doing prison time, that was when I did not have very much control over my life. My life was very much controlled by the system. I was a product of the system, I did end up in foster care, I did use detention centers, I ended up in a variety of situations where my freedom was curtailed. ... When I was caught up in the system, I knew even then I had a lot to contribute to our society, to our communities.* (December 1, 2010)

Leslie highlights the need in his life for awakening, reclamation of control and a visioning of his future as implicit to both individual and intergenerational healing. Becoming aware is a key to cultural identity and healthy living. At WAVS the potentially violent offender is taught opportunities to take a step back and try to mentally assess his/her escalating thoughts, physiological experiences and behaviours before hurting anyone. Likewise, a recipient of violence can reclaim some semblance of control by being prepared for emergencies. WAVS

encourages If possible, to save small amounts of money, know which supportive friends or family members to contact, and know where community safe houses are if s/he has to leave for protection reasons.

Joe and Joyce inform me of a particular way of controlling oneself in order to get what one needs out of the system. It is a way of accepting and tolerating organizational hierarchies until they work to a person's benefit. This is especially true in the case of the government Ministry charged with caring for apprehended children. The Fossellas advise WAVS members who have lost custody of their children, hopefully only temporarily, to take what social workers offer. Joe encourages parents and in some cases grandparents to *take advantage of [the Ministry's help] so you won't be stressing out about trying to do this and that with your children as another stress. So [WAVS members] begin to understand how they're talking to their social workers and whoever [else]* (December 15, 2010). To 'win the game of wellness' Indigenous peoples must lose certain battles. To get their lives on track they must occasionally submit to the colonial powers and 'do exactly what they say' in situations where it is advisable. It appears some parents must still follow colonial orders to a certain degree even in the governance of one's private life. The brutal truth taught through compassion and experience is a paradox—while finding our ancestors' wisdom we must consciously obey certain segments of present Western rule and acknowledge the vital knowledges needed in order to reunite families. The Fossellas encourage distraught parents and guardians to

*Do exactly what they say because until you are able to convince them that you are changed they're going to continue to think the [other] way, that you need this and you need that and this [adversarial relationship with the Ministry] is going to go on and on until you can prove to them that you are making a difference in yourself and that you can communicate with others.*  
(December 15, 2010)

Here lies the necessity for concrete decision-making: either *stop* negative behaviours to gain a positive lifestyle or don't stop and face negative consequences. Reality is sometimes very cut and dry. In George Orwell's (1949) classic book, *1984*, the word 'Ministry' can imply multiple connotations. It can be thought of as ministering care or on the other hand, traditionally oppressive Christian doctrines and practices against Indigenous peoples in Canada during both the residential school era. Our present foster care system also falls

under the Ministry of Families and Childhood Development. Sadly, in the latter system, children today, just as they were during the residential school era, continue to be *Stolen from our Embrace*, as Suzanne Fourney and Ernie Crey state as the title of their 1998 book.

And yet beyond the oppression, certain services like affordable housing and supportive parenting courses, if necessary, can be vital to individuals' economic, spiritual, emotional, physical and mental recovery. I share with Joe and Joyce this story from when I lived in Vernon, BC, as a facilitator from 1997 to 2007 for *Nobody's Perfect*, a federally funded socio-educational parenting program for parents of children under the age of 6, many of whose children had been placed in foster care.

*My co-facilitator and I were usually approved to run two 8-week sessions a year but on this occasion, the Ministry of Children and Family Development requested us to pilot a session in which all parents, for one reason or another, have their children living under the guardianship of the Ministry. The parents were so angry and sad. Number one, they were traumatized and grieving; they couldn't focus on the Nobody's Perfect teachings because emotions are running high about the Ministry taking their kids, working out supervised visits or being completely denied visiting rights with their children. The other issue – I don't mean to trivialize the participants—but under these emotional conditions, 'lessons on parenting', were like taking piano lessons when you have no piano at home to practice on. Parents had no child at home to practice the parenting skills being offered them. (December 15, 2010)*

Family reconciliation involves all parties; how children are healed and prepared for reintegration, how parents gain self-confidence and prove their competence, depends on the latter's working with the Ministry to put the skills they are taught into practice. Being emotionally stuck, unable to change present behaviours for the well-being of a present child and for the benefit of future generations, can signify being stuck in 'blame mode.' Yet Joyce reflects, *When you think about it, maybe 25% or more of the participants who are working to get their kids back get them back.* (December 15, 2010)



**5.2.5 North: *I don't have to worry about looking over my shoulder or who's watching me.* ~ David**

**Air/Universal**

*Every answer brings meaning and every choice brings meaning to where I am now, so I'm thankful for what happened in my life, which brings me to sitting here with you right now.*

~ Terry (Present Member, March 16, 2011)

Like Terry, Leslie moves from sharing his personal journey to sharing his personal universal values and beliefs and his collective, connective awareness. The use of tools (oils) and nature (air) for recovery inclusive of land, life, air, sky, sea, self, fire and our core-being, shows that healing is transparent. The environment of storytelling embodies both pain and transparency in WAVS groups, suggesting that we can nullify the pain of our actions but then suffering is inevitable. On the positive side, Leslie sees the relationality amongst all life forms and his place on earth to care and to nurture. His mindset is resonant of the North Dimension where he feels and demonstrates care and nurturing for all living entities. *This world is not as easy to walk upon as a conscious human being who is concerned about everything* (December 1, 2010). I wonder although, *everything*? The vastness seems impossible to completely understand, yet worthy of unpacking. Within Indigenous Knowledge Systems, not all stories taught for learning-value follow a beginning-middle-end scenario as do most Westernized plotlines. Nevertheless, Leslie does want to share his journey, start to finish, about how he became a facilitator at WAVS. He is very skilled at summarizing his thoughts and at bringing him and myself as research-questioner right back to the original enquiries asked throughout our conversation together.

## Intellectual

*We learn it [racism] all over the place, whether it's TV or radio or just people in general on the street. And a lot of it, too, I think a lot of it is about being bitter and being hatred, a lot of it comes from hatred.*

~ Patsy (Former Member, December 17, 2010)

Patsy's comment reveals insidious racism; assimilation policies that her former public school principal was likely trying to diplomatically follow. Unfortunately, such comments do not resonate as educational intelligence. Also from within an institution defined for education, M. tells us,

*I was moved away to a corner away from my friends and she [the teacher] just basically would try to hint that I'm a dumb, stupid thing because I didn't speak any English. I was a real quick learner but I didn't feel like speaking the language, I didn't like her attitude towards me, so I didn't say anything for the longest time. But one day I did surprise her and repeat everything that she said, and you know, I'd known how to do it for a long time before I let her know. (March 3, 2011)*

M. brings to light the false assumption that intelligence has to do with one's capacity to speak English, as if it were the pinnacle of human enlightenment. Her self-control is a resistance to not being a robotic student, as demanded by her colonial-schooled teacher. Such resistance could be characterized as M. taking agency. She would speak English on her own time and terms. We tend to think that racism results from differences in physical appearances, values, attitudes and behaviours. But more often than not, it is also a product of hearing differences in another's speech as illogical racism experienced by many First peoples globally. In fact, how one makes another feel can influence what a person remembers as a recipient of thoughts, words and actions as participants validate throughout this study.

David, who now works with youths, describes his experience in terms of the feelings it generates:

*I facilitate part time because of my disability I'm allowed to make 500 a month ... So they hire me just for a little short time. Maybe four hours, sometimes two hours. When we're doing healing circles when we talk about ourselves ... everybody's happy and there's a good feeling. (February 28, 2011)*

Of course the very traumatic reasons that bring members to WAVS, the reasons that unite them are not all happy, but I think David is speaking from a spiritual, ancestral and universal point of view. He seems excited because he never imagined he would or could make change having a reputation as a bully in the society where he came from, *especially after I took my brother's life*, he declares. He also describes WAVS as the place

*where I found myself, my feelings, my anger and where I felt accepted. Where people are really listening and people are trying to help each other to support each other to get better, to get better in ways of living or to enjoy themselves as a human being, you know, to be a human. (December 7, 2010)*

This participant's mention of connectedness between people and environment again brings to mind Leslie's quote that *every member of any organization—from WAVS to every member of BP Oil or whatever—should take life-skills and Medicine Wheel courses*. The absence of something vital in life can lead to feelings of being able to get away with the abuse one inflicts. Then come the repercussions: *We will feel the effects we're yet to suffer from* (December 1, 2010). The co-facilitator demonstrates a kinship between the storytelling environment and the emotional pain of healing; the intellect shows that experience can be transformed into wisdom.

### **Elders/Ancestors**

*An Elder is someone who is respectful and who teaches the way in a truthful and honest way.*

~ White Owl (Present Member, December 9, 2010)

White Owl's words remind me of Joe, who believes the role of a Knowledge Keeper is to pass on healing knowledge 'in a good way'. However, this participant also respectfully

looks at both sides of a fragile dilemma. As a former inmate he suggests that CSC provides some Elders for their Aboriginal population who either advertently or inadvertently may be too engaged in the Western systemic hierarchy that undermines circular relationality as required by Indigenous law to which he formerly refers in chapter 4. Although this participant suggests that correctional laws provide some Elders who work with inmates in CSC without the best intentions to help Aboriginal peoples spiritually, he previously makes known there are other Elders who are there for their people with the sincere purpose to help them heal, like Fossella and Parker.

*When I talk about prison Elders, perceived Elders, Elders who work in an institution are the same as guards, they're just an extension of the CSC [Correction Services Canada] and they're above us. So they're in a position of authority. The inmates are vulnerable; we're in a vulnerable position. So even with an Elder who is abusing his authority, they think, 'Oh this guy's an Elder'. It's all about superiors and inferiors when you think about it; they appoint themselves Elders. Just because someone has long hair, braids and all that you know or have that Native look, 'Oh, they're an Elder. (December 9, 2010)*

White Owl lends support to vulnerable, wounded people and explores to whom they can turn for trusting relationships. He notes, *There are some leaders out there who do follow natural law, they're good people ... they're living their purpose and following the instruction of the Creator.* When Aboriginal peoples argue for the right to steer their own course of action or more concisely we must recognize the power of both 'good' and 'not as good' leaders to shape the development of communities. Who is responsible for this perception of who/what an Elder it is? Who is responsible for naming and claiming? Is the issue with the manipulation of what one portrays as righteousness? Spiritual Elder fraud seems to be another factor in perpetuation of violence and inter-tribe conflict. When the wiseman is unwise—what happens then? I cannot say, but fortunately I can lean on Cajeté (1994), who affirms our original teachings.

Indian Elders often remind young people to live the myths by saying, 'These stories, this language, these ways and this land are the only

valuables we can give you – but life is in them for those who know how to ask and how to learn’. (p. 41).

### 5.3 Closing Discussion

In chapter 5 I continue overlapping storywork by focusing even more so on understanding participants’ embodied experiences of fear, rage and violence; residential school torments; subversive racism; incarceration; and loss of culture and self-control. Fortunate for many participants WAVS is that timely re/connection. Like my own mind-body-pain, their experiential racism is off the charts and may never cease to exist. Yet they are able to articulate exactly and intimately how the WAVS intervention model supports their healing from both their intergenerational and contemporary perceptions and experiences of family violence. From an Indigenous wholistic perspective, journeying the Medicine Wheel’s five symbolic dimensions of Sacred-self, East, South, West and North, participants both teach me and patiently allow me to learn. Together we identify past trauma, present socio-personal repercussions, spiritually pragmatic cultural practices and trust in attainable futures.

Terry, Patsy, M., Patrick and Leslie exemplify that despite dire circumstances learning is always possible Life-altering decisions can be made and emancipatory healing can arise through education. Singer/songwriter Bob Marley writes in his “Redemption Song”, “emancipate yourself from mental slavery; none but ourselves can free our mind” (Bob Marley Lyrics, 2012). In one of my first visits to WAVS, I learn from facilitator, Dan, of our ancestral knowledges as education:

*Dan begins to talk about Aboriginal history, how we gave prized possessions away in honour and respectful ceremonies, how the White settlers could not understand this. Only after contact did Aboriginal men learn they should be king of their home, of their woman. Only then were they told their traditions and beliefs before this time were all wrong. He says he is now proud of his heritage and all that his ancestors went through. The Elders knew we would need the teachings and ‘after seven generations of sleeping’ they are now sharing all they know with us. I believe he means Aboriginal peoples, in general, were figuratively asleep for seven generations and now many are eager to learn what the Elders have to share with them about old traditions*

*and customs that thrived before colonialism.* (Group Meeting Field Note, April 15, 2008)

Having faith for a better future involves trust in our past Elders and present Knowledge Keepers. Even mandatory attendance at residential schools has taught participants that knowledge is power and that learning vocational training, academic teachings, cultural knowledge, and/or personal/communal awareness can provide that very power. Participant after participant sees his or her own story as amazing, and rightly so. Turning such views around from the traumatic to the triumphant is emancipatory for participants to heal and to actively share positive assistance to others in need as Freda, Melanie, Ryan, David and Michael do with their children and with community youth.

## Chapter 6: Researcher Learnings

*My husband Stephen and I are out walking and as I often do, I snuggle into his right arm. This particular time, he thinks that I am guiding him to turn left at a corner, rather than walk straight ahead. As we sort our perceptions, I explain, 'No, dear, I'm not leading you—I'm just ever-so-gently, falling over.'*  
(Personal Field Note, November 3, 2011)

### 6.1 Context

First Nations peoples' health and healing journeys are of paramount value to the collaborative work I/We undertake with many urban Aboriginal peoples concerned about their relational struggles with violence. Acknowledging life from within the self as my husband and I do on this particular evening is a necessary starting point leading towards renewal. In this chapter, 'Researcher Learnings', I offer, first, a final overview of my perceptions about WAVS. Second, I re/address some of the literature devoted to highlighting the overwhelming plight of oppression and violence past and presently experienced by many Aboriginal peoples and ways in which they are impacted. Finally, I reflect upon how WAVS' teachings attribute to wholistic healing and wellness. Under the subsequent subheadings of Total Person, Total Health and Total Environment I describe **10 themes** gleaned from my/our research as learned by the participants and I. Readers may note that in this chapter narrative I denote the various discoveries in bold so as not to interrupt the writer/readership flow. As well content in each section is not intended to be exclusive of one another as I continue to promote interfaced explanations about our dominant mainstream healthcare theory and practices; how they remain problematic to traditional Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and healing; and lastly, how WAVS offers a more culturally-competent, wholistic and educative way of wellness.

"Indigenous storywork is not an easy process but is essential to educating the mind, body and spirit which is what we mean by Indigenous education," says Archibald (2008, p. 143). A very real theory/methodological tension I face while finalizing these last two chapters 6 and 7 is the necessary task of putting to discourse all that I have created, co-created, taught, learned and articulated throughout my PhD work. As I struggle to succinctly do so a simple yet effective phrase comes to mind, I have in the past mentored colleagues and community associates with it. I suddenly feel appreciative that the thought takes an elbow-

nudge at me: 'If you had to describe your career in only the words that might fit on a T-shirt what would they read?' My T-shirt, hot off the press, reads:

Indigenous Health and Wellness  
Indigenous Knowledges and Protocols  
Indigenous Methodologies  
University/community Collaborative Research

My/Our research shows the purpose, pathways and valued guidance of a Vancouver community agency called Warriors Against Violence Society and its staff and members who effectively demonstrate traditional ways to heal from present-day family violence. WAVS opened its doors in 1997 on the hearts and souls of two men, Joe Fossella and Daniel Parker. Soon afterwards their wives Joyce Fossella and Gail Parker became facilitators in the organization's socio-educational counseling program for healing from family violence through re/learning traditional cultural ways of knowing and being. They began so with no money and no setting in which to share their vital wisdom, their very real experiences and recovery from abuse and neglect. After much 'pounding the pavement', one lone Vancouver residential agency finally gave the health-warriors a home complete with meeting and office space that over the 15 years has remained rent-free. During my time at WAVS from 2009 to the present I have seen group members, interim co-facilitators and counselor/social worker practicum students come and go. I have also met members who do not want to leave WAVS; it has become their extended family of trust vulnerability hurts happiness and guidance in their lives. None want to hear of WAVS having to close its doors either through lack of healthcare funding or lack of successor-leadership. Nor do I.

Startling, yet underrepresented and outdated literature speaks to the health of urban Aboriginal peoples in Canada. By now I know the statistics by heart: nearly one third more people who self-report Aboriginal ancestry are abused than those who do not identify as Aboriginal; eight out of ten Aboriginal women have reported being abused; and Aboriginal women report abuse three times higher than Aboriginal men. Representing as low as 3% of the Canadian population, nearly one fifth of Aboriginal peoples are housed in Correctional Facilities nationally in which 75% of Aboriginal youth in detention are/were also connected with the Ministry of Family and Childhood Development foster-care programs related to child-apprehension policies. The poverty rates for Aboriginal peoples are almost double that of non-Aboriginal peoples. In this case the Statistics Canada data report is updated from



2000 to 2007 with no apparent changes to charted figures. This action may be evidentiary of two variables, either an example of non-culturally-specific unreliable research about the welfare of Aboriginal families, or that the overall trend of poverty continues with no significant decreases.

What former research is available to me as a scholar is questionable on three accounts. First is the high probability of under-representation of self-reporting from community members who experience violence. Second is the under-representation of culturally-competent researchers and ways of researching. Under-reporting family violence is like the multiple strands of my woven Métis sash. Alone each is no more weak or stronger than the other but together, a tapestry of relevant historical and present meanings emerge, like the inter-related *What/Who/Why/How/Where/So what/Now what* understated considerations of the sash. Third is the lack of knowledge in theory and methodological practice by non-Indigenous research/ers and assumptions about understanding and methods best suited for the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples today. This Indigenous Collaborative Research project is designed to demonstrate a shift in both the focus and the outcome of present participatory studies. For example, often when Joe introduces me to a new group of members at meetings, celebrations or community events, he speaks with pride and honour that Dr. Richard Vedan was the first Aboriginal university student to co-research with WAVS and that I am now the second (For Vedan's work see "How do We Forgive our Fathers: Angry/Violent Aboriginal/First Nations Men's Experiences with Social Workers", 2002). Fossella widely welcomes culturally-competent researchers as a way of 'spreading the news' about the WAVS Family Violence Intervention Model for the benefit of those families in need of violence intervention as well as the government bodies responsible for policy and funding decisions.

Meanwhile, on the peripheral of political matters stand the men, women and youth who either routinely or seasonally turn to WAVS. Here, members are given an opportunity to acquire ancestral knowledges of our culturally-specific spiritual-selves, which in the case of violent trauma—unlock too often painful yet many triumphant—doors to our heart, physicality and intellect. As co-researchers on behalf of WAVS we collaboratively asked the following two research questions and can now express meaningful responses to them.

1. How does WAVS articulate and conceptualize its cultural components and their importance of being implemented and received as an intervention model for healing from family violence?

2. How does the WAVS intervention model impact and support members wishing to heal from both their intergenerational and contemporary perceptions and experiences of family?

As the above queries become responsive, participants are most clear that WAVS provides both the setting and the support necessary for combatting some of the participants' dis-ease across a wide range of topics such as work, parenting, dealing with the Ministry of Children and Family Development about child-custody, individual and collective health and other societal challenges. Many who find themselves in the WAVS circle echo sentiments that they have finally found comfort among people who simply listen and understand what they are going through or that they are now able to offer peer-guidance to others by setting an example of bridging historical trauma with present wholistic wellness. The many years it has taken each of the 22 participants to make positive change are like water trickling down into a cup from a broken and rusted faucet over a long period of time. The faucet (as the mainstream system) does not expect the water (as the person) to amass itself as a whole entity—its purpose instead, is to hold back the water. Yet despite this the cup eventually becomes 'filled.'

## 6.2 Total Person

*I know what that heartbeat sounds like and it's the beat of a drum; my heart is Cree.*

~ Leslie (Facilitator, December 1, 2010)

**The first and foremost theme** to emerge from the research is that programs like WAVS, whose practices are drawn from the culture and worldviews of Indigenous peoples seem to work best because of their emphasis on tradition, honesty, humility and spirituality. Their irrevocable connection to land and conservation, belief in equality among all, harmony among one another, and their commitment to collective wellness and future generations is evident. In addition, WAVS embodies a sense of strong sense of gratitude to people, nature and cultural activities. One of its best practices is that of storytelling. Being central to learning norms, storytelling transfers knowledge and links people to their culture and fosters understanding between generations.

**The second theme** is that by naming our Sacred-self, engaging with themselves and safely with trusted like-minded people participants accept the past and eagerly elicit

self-recovery of that which was taken from them during residential schooling, family violence and punitive imprisonment. Slowly, despite traumatic incidents the re/gaining of self-worth and trust is now being passed forward to our eighth, ninth and tenth generations. Expressed, perceived and received racism can lessen; emotional and physical pain levels can diminish; and acceptance from society can happen when we *Hope for Change—Change Can Happen by Healing the Wounds of Family Violence with Indigenous Traditional Wholistic Practices*. Because of the interrelatedness of the whole being of an Aboriginal person, accessing the spiritual-self leads directly to also healing the heart, body and mind and the knowledge that according to Indigenous worldviews. Our universe is interconnected to all.

A disconnect between ourselves and our surroundings implies an unintentional neglect of the environment and by extension, the forsaking of our total person, our Sacred-self. This reflects the culture of Western society that epitomizes independence and individuality. The nature of reality is much more complex as participants have shared. The strongest exemplar—that of being inclusively institutionalized by the age of five via bombardment of life-long racism and discrimination within residential schooling and Canada's prison system. Throughout the thesis I also share pivotal moments of my own life that are meant to serve as linkages to my experiences, participants, WAVS' theory and understanding some of the complex components of each. Analogies range from my introductory poem as a grown child of alcoholic parents, to body and mind pain/racism, to what urban animals seems to assert, to a wooden-carved walking stick, each feasible as complimentary materials and methods of educational consideration.

Western ideals of healthcare since colonization have been and still are, imposed upon Indigenous peoples who perceive reality to be inherently different—truly, one is in an interdependent relationship with nature and the world. An absence of this connection leads to fear of being alone and isolated. As a result, inner-conflicts and relational discord become the unnatural norm. By becoming aware of this state we can consciously make the effort to engage with the living environment. Through sensorial learning of nature and people we begin the path toward the perceiving self as an integral part of an interconnected environment. In doing so also embark on the journey towards healing. My/Our research could have implications on mainstream healthcare, particular in mental healthcare that is still colonial in effect regarding the expertise of medical theory, knowing and directed practice. Western research is rarely conducive to Aboriginal worldviews. According to Indigenous worldviews the mental being is broader since the perception of existence is situated in the social, natural and spiritual world. Yet the traditional healthcare paradigm still seems to

focus on the personal malady that has biological origins effectively divorced from the broader natural of social and spiritual worlds. Baskin (2005) echoes that IM and IK I would add, “involves how we gather our information, the stories we choose to tell and how we communicate them” (171).

### 6.3 Total Health

*There's a lot of things that I learned about my own behaviors, about my anger, my jealousy. I also learned lots about my culture, like going back. I always had it in my life but it brought me closer.*

~ David (Former Member, December 8, 2010)

When talking about being—or becoming—human, some participants seem to indirectly refer to the dehumanizing processes they survived within institutional settings, whether they remain in them 24/7 or have re/occurring or life-long contact with them. M.'s situation as a boarder differs from Patsy's, who was bussed home daily from a residential school built on the outskirts of her community. Although it may have been her good fortune to be brought up within her family setting, Patsy became a dual-victim of hatred because of both envy on the part of other students and racism on the part of her teachers. When you are told what to do every minute you spend in such a school and you know that the people there have already made up their mind about you, there is no need for emotion, cognition, awareness or conscience, until such understanding may or may not be of healing-need in adulthood.

Trauma experienced in childhood has enormous implications for one's developmental trajectory. It can radically alter the regulation of emotions, social competencies, physiological processes and cognitive development (Witten, 2010; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010). Donna suggests that trauma leads to feelings of fear about any ambiguous situation—resulting in anxiety, shame, emotional upset, worry about personal safety and concern for the future. When one experiences a traumatic event, it is important to be able to share it with other people. However, if there is some aspect of the event that is considered taboo or socially unacceptable, such as sexual abuse by a family member it can lead not only to reluctance of disclosure but also to memory repression. The re/surfacing memories that Gerry experiences about two horrific murders he was forced to witness as a child under the age of five serve as a stark example.

At WAVS, in a sharing circle of trust and understanding he is able to feel safe and supported enough to begin working with the present trauma of his memories. The consequences of such suppression are physiological and psychological disorders, primarily because a person must exert additional effort to keep the memory suppressed. Suppression can then lead to inordinate amounts of stress. However, the moment a person is able to share their story with others or even to put pen to paper and express the story in the form of a journal entry, as WAVS also encourages, the person joins a path towards healing.

**The third theme** is that a culturally-competent environment is important for delivering optimal services. Effective communication remains paramount to adopting cultural competency and is not solely limited to verbal communication. Cultural competency can be defined as the ability of organizations, professions and individuals to work effectively in culturally-diverse environment and situations (Bean, 2006). The outcomes of cultural competency include knowledge, attitudes and skill sets to engage Aboriginal peoples in a welcoming and respectful manner. Dr. Evan Adams, BC's Aboriginal Deputy Provincial Health Officer, declares, "Health professionals and social service workers should simply not have racist attitudes; if they do, they should fail their tests and not be allowed to practice among peoples" (Cultural Safety Symposium, December 7, 2007). From the previous study I worked before being accepted to work with WAVS, I will never forget one Aboriginal woman's story. While visiting with a psychologist to assist her through some rough times, the doctor would often droop and recover his eyes and head in drowsiness while she was talking—to the point where he once nodded off so much so that *'he bumped his forehead on his desk'*. According to Dr. Adams, yes, this individual could be considered culturally incompetent. How sad an example towards the interest of an Aboriginal 'client' by a particular 'qualified' but certainly uninterested healthcare provider.

**The fourth theme** involves processing and meaning-making of repressed events through storytelling which then frees the body's resources for other important functions (Pennebaker, 1990) like focusing on spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual healing. Indigenous stories are not the same as Westernized stories set to the familiar linear plot sequence of start to finish; rather, they tend to cycle back to where they began. In working with the Medicine Wheel as a symbolic framework, it becomes for participants a tool towards health and wellness that encourages us to jump back and forth among different points in our lives, weaving experiences together into one complete pattern with the Sacred-self at its core. This self is not the final goal to be achieved but something that existed from the very beginning and undergoes both transformation and reclamation.

We cannot step twice into the same river. Nature is in a constant state of renewal, as are WAVS members who support and sometimes also challenge one another, and we will always be adjusting to her and humanity's ebb and flow and the need to respect limitations by not overstraining the living environment. Similar to participant Roberta's commitment to her present and future grandchildren's wellness, Cole (2006) states, "We always must use commonsense thinking because we must think of the children of tomorrow. We come through life respecting mother earth. When you don't respect mother earth, you see her as an 'it'" (p. 178). Indeed, a teamwork strategy engages and not destroys, Mother Nature.

Despite the benefits of this kind of group therapy, there are also many barriers to it, including fear of becoming a victim of gossip, which makes the issue of confidentiality ever more vital. The reality is, for many Aboriginal peoples, *the Native community is too small ... everybody knows each other—it's like the moccasin telegraph*, as Freda puts it. The idea of postponing her healing journey may seem at odds with Western-based standards of 'Just do it!' according to the Nike brand slogan but such a call has a significant impact on our social lives.

**A fifth theme revealed** is the paradoxical nature of disclosing childhood to adulthood 'secrets' in a safe environment such as sharing circles. Secrets of shame and of aggressive behaviours can be a part of "unknown factors" that contribute to the Five Reasons for Abuse that I explore in chapter 2. They are both propulsion towards a better future, yet also, hindrance to facing the truth of reciprocal violence. WAVS helps participants find the "secrets" to unwind their destructive recipient and/or perpetrator cycles. Joe describes it this way:

*If I see something like [silence of denial] go on for too long, I'm going to pull them aside and ask them [about it]. When you don't share, you're not going to come back. You're not being heard, so you think, 'Well, my problems aren't as big as their problems.' So you're minimizing [your self/situation] again and you're not getting through it. I don't know if they're using it [passivity] as an excuse not to talk or if they feel like their life is not as hurtful as some other people's. It doesn't matter to me. It doesn't matter how big the problem or how small the problem; they have to talk. (December 15, 2010)*

Feeling multiple emotions of distrust, fear and anger before one can even seek healing and happiness becomes a triumph over adversity for participants at Warriors. Many

healing journeys must begin with the painful, yet courageous task of honest revelation. I repeatedly encounter in our conversations, just how necessary it is to go through negative feelings and their causes in order to move on to more positive futures are lessons. Incomprehensible yet familiar anger becomes the emotional, internal fire that we don't fully understand but as with many participants, we still need to look for and to interpret its origins, and digging deeper into our sacred-selves eventually uncovers them. Patrick exemplifies the arduous journey to recovering his whole-self out of his negative memories. He defines his own post-traumatic stress disorder as when *all our systems start to break down. Our thinking starts to get distorted; our emotions become erratic because they're focused all on the trauma* (February 16, 2011). But when a person begins learning how *not to* name, blame and shame, and instead, take full personal responsibility for self-health, true and/or lasting awakening can occur. To this end, he describes that WAVS has taught him *all kinds of ranges of opportunities and [ways] to conduct myself emotionally, gracefully* (February 16, 2011). A similar transformation is described by Chrystos, an American Indian poet, in her book, *Not Vanishing* (1988). She shares an enchanting vision of possible transformation out of many stories of loneliness and marginalization: "in the northern mountains / Moon is a silver turtle / moving slowly through the stars" (p. 88).

The experiences and relationships we encounter, the ways in which we learn how to relate or not to relate with people and provide an understanding of the awareness that exist at this particular point of time regarding individual, community and national wellness issues. Vedan (2002) describes our relational wholeness, core to our Indigeneity, as "the perception of the undivided entirety of things and the visioning of the interconnectedness of all things" (p. 226). "Learning is a growth and life process; and Life and Nature are always relationships in process," reminds Cajeté, (2000, p. 24). It is always encouraging to hear when people are ready to pass on their wisdom because that is how community facilitators become who they are. The WAVS program originally centered on its founders continues the benefits of a similar program they had attended, called "Change of Seasons." Between Dan and Joe, with Dan now passed on, Joe is, in effect, the last pillar standing. The agency appreciates any and all community resources to help keep it going and additionally needs future leaders as dedicated as the founders were when the time comes for Joe to pass on the reins.

**A sixth theme** stands out, that WAVS' long-term sustainability is important to the healing opportunities present and future members as most dedicated community administrators and members are those who genuinely share their organization's vision and culture, it is ever more vital to keep WAVS' Indigenous values and operating systems alive

through Freda, Michael and M. who are now community front-line professionals; Patsy, working towards a psychology degree; Melanie, a solo parent of 5 children being taught Indigenous spiritual ways in an urban setting; Patrick, returning to Vancouver's Native Education College to complete his grade 12 graduation certificate; and Terry, also enrolled there, who *finally made that leap to become a counselor* (March 16, 2011).

**As the seventh theme**, self-control involving both the loss from systemic or structural violence and the reclamation of our volition and very responsibility (the ability to respond) to care for ourselves, seems to involve increased input into one's human development; unfortunately, society's dominant forces of subjugation often undermine our Sacred-self development. Mainstream constraints can paralyze self-wellness so that a person might then vent his or her spiritual, emotional and physical frustrations as hate and animosity towards oneself and/or others. A loss of childhood and youth is possible when this cycle begins at an early age. Leslie's pivotal moment of sacred-self reclamation, in which he rejected the path of self-harm, brings to mind some people who are HIV-positive with whom I have worked in the past. Some can remember the exact setting, situation and moment they sunk the contaminated (shared) needle into themselves. In both theirs and Leslie experiences, the individual recognizes the moment when his or her life changed dramatically and irrevocably, for better or worse. But in Leslie's case, what he recalls is the moment he *saved* his own life. Like Patrick, White Owl and David, he is a product of colonialism and jail, the outcome of an oppressive deficit model system that encourages one's institutional self-destruction and yet he was not destroyed. While we can accept that nature's elements are fluid, ever-changing and a precise decision to walk a more positive and stable path with less ebb and flow seems eminent. Nature can put down roots by necessity and perhaps so must humans; however, our decisions must be context-based, situational and within our self-control.

## 6.4 Total Environment

*It's about talking about your problems in a healthy environment.*

~ White Owl (Present Member, December 9, 2010)

There are two environments in which Aboriginal peoples operate: that of our culture and that of the systemic Western system we must learn to use for survival. We need to examine our tool kits and decide which specific instruments are beneficial and how we can



use particular ones offered by our culture, such as the Medicine Wheel, without their falling prey to misappropriation. Understanding and finding our place in the current Western dominant system can ultimately promote not just survival but more general action leading to social justice.

**An eighth theme** throughout participants' storywork, is that of difference. The need for diversity of culturally-relevant interventions is paramount; the truth that 'one size *does not* fit all' must be considered. Once we accept diversity of peoples and of ways towards healing, we can then accept a diversity of healthcare approaches. It seems mainstream health and mind care policy and practice frameworks do not focus on diversity. Another reason why universality may not work is that *specificity* is what seems to attract WAVS members; they 'feel at home' among people who share similar experiences. Participants affirm that healing for Indigenous peoples involves comfort in the local, in the known (or at least referred to) and in the trusted. This fact can be witnessed even in the primary way that WAVS welcomes new members—through word of mouth within the Aboriginal community. Such a relational method of sharing resources keeps true to traditional Indigenous practice. Testimony of people whom one may know and trust confirms the personal quality of service. Not only is it a form of free advertising, it is a return to intimate oral ways of communication rather than mass-advertised, contemporary written ones.

**The ninth theme** recognizes that balance of health and well-being means to hold deep respect for nature and life; to live in harmony with the earth; and to know the onus of Earth's destruction or ability to recuperate, is designated to our Indigenous Knowledge Keepers. Earth is a foundational cornerstone that offers a sense of stability; it demonstrates the concept of oneness that the people have with the land. White Owl informs us, *I think it's very rare when you see Native people, Indigenous people leaving their homeland because you got strong ties to the land* (December 9, 2010). This Indigenous concept of oneness within a spiritual worldview interfaces with the idea of oneness found in Mother Nature, no matter where one lives. The RHS Report (2007) reminds us that from an Indigenous theoretical perspective, everything is alive. Bastian (2007) excites us to discover that "The entire universe is trying to communicate with us and give us information about what is possible" (p. 40).

**Lastly, the tenth theme** recognizes that healing involves re/connecting people to the knowledge that initial traumas are of disconnection. WAVS provides in many ways, that necessary first step to cultural understanding and re/inter-connectedness. Their intervention provides culturally-relevant tradition, teachings and ceremonial practice through authentic

and reverent role-modelling. They foster member-to-member accountability and as an extension, that accountability also involves demands from one another in the group. Stemming from facilitator approval and encouragement, members are implicitly taught how to counsel one another. Scrutiny, challenge and accountability also involves counter-storytelling, whereby value also lies in what is not being said. Facilitators and seasoned members occasionally prompt or redirect a member saying something like, 'I hear you, my brother (or sister), I too have been there. But you've mentioned a lot about your spouse or parent tonight and are kind of leaving out yourself. Why is it you are here? What is it that has brought you to WAVS at this time? What changes in yourself do you want to make?'

Returning to the fragmentation of lives, our familial environments require stability. Participants were frequently transplanted, removed from families of origin to residential school, and/or from foster home to foster home, unable to put down roots in any trustworthy circle or community. For instance, my conversation with Terry touches on the anger he feels as an off-shoot of systemic social violence. When I ask him if his anger comes from personal experience or from intuitive knowing, he answers, *My anger stems from personal experience from my upbringings* (March 16, 2011). The persistent transience as a child and instability of home and family seem to be significant sources of anger for Terry. To make matters worse, considering Terry, Stuart and Gerry, when the constant motion of moving from home-to-home seemingly comes to an end, a new cycle of abuse emerges. Not only does suffering derive from insecure attachment to a specific caregiver and familial setting but right when a situation seems 'safe and stable', physical and emotional abuse and/or lack of trust can ensue in the new context. The cycle of abuse seems never-ceasing and leads to the rise of slow-churning anger, not only for oneself but also toward others.

## 6.5 Closing Discussion

Through the therapeutic act of helping others, in a feedback loop, one helps oneself heal and one heals by helping others to similarly recover. Healing is how we disrupt what we do not wish to repeat. Re-centering our Sacred-selves among the five dimensions of the Medicine Wheel provides a beginning for our healing journeys. If people are not ready to centre their Sacred-self, perhaps they are not ready for healing.

As part of the healing process that occurs within the WAVS living-context, members learn of traditional, ancestral knowledge held by Aboriginal Elders. As such, those who are

parents develop life-skills that permeate aspects of their lives, filtering down to parenting practices and family life. As Melanie tells in her story, the norms, values, beliefs and attitudes she learns at WAVS inevitably strengthen her relationship with her children; specifically, she is able to communicate, open up, to be receptive and to adapt her responses to the needs of each individual child. In doing so she has developed an awareness that the relationships she has with her children need not reflect her own experiences with her mother. The positive parenting skills she acquires reflect the necessity of learning Indigenous knowledge, which for many Indigenous peoples of the past century, was wholly absent as a result of the mis/education imposed by Canada's residential schooling system.

Family is also seen as the impetus for change and an area of first priority. By understanding the important place family-hood holds within our lives, David returns to his Indigenous knowledge of interrelatedness, accepting that his drug addiction impeded his ability to create meaningful relationships with his children and grandchildren and therefore obstructed his own path to health. As in the Indigenous worldview, overall well-being does not exist within the vacuum of a person's physical body. Rather, to overcome learned aggression or substance use and achieve wholistic health, we must inter-relationally incorporate family, see its importance and use it as a catalyst for change. This can be seen in juxtaposition to the values of Western individualism, whereby health is seen as based on one's individual behaviors and less import is given to family and the impact our actions have on those around us. A research contribution such as this offers viable implications on Western health. It disrupts the notion of individual health and suggests health is inextricably tied to the health of the family and one's relations.

Other participants' stories further speak to the family's vital role. In M. and Patsy's situations, movement from their grandparents' traditional upbringing in which Indigenous child-focused values were seen in action, to the residential school system, represents an abrupt and dramatic change. These experiences made the women realize the positivity and value of her grandparents' culturally-based practices. However, for Patsy, one negative aspect to her family life was the parental absence that resulted in a diffusion of responsibility for the upbringing of younger children, as she experienced with her young aunties who often neglected their even younger charges. Supportive adults are vital to children's lives, especially when the children become subject to betrayal and scorn. The rejection that the Fossella boys experienced when dressed in traditional regalia on their school's 'International Day' demonstrates the impact of racism; in imagining how these boys must have felt, I can

conclude that in the years of their lives leading up to that moment, they needed their parents and extended family to value them and teach them pride in their culture so that they might protect their Sacred-selves against colonization's present-day and future effects.

After much reflection on the multitude of reciprocal teachings and learnings between the participants and I in this chapter, a lingering question remains for me: is it the researcher's role to find the 'correct' facts about Aboriginal experience or to let a participant's perspectives be factual, in and of themselves? While staying true to participants' transcripts, I also recognize my own perspective (and construction of knowledge) as a valid voice, too, in the mix of all voices necessary to present this project. This chapter is, in fact, about my perceptions of all that participants have shared with me. While our perceptions are not always completely accurate, we must move forward with them, as they are what seems, in the moment, reality to us; like the ways I turn to my husband for physical support, enough so that in my opening anecdote for this chapter, he thinks I am subtly, directionally leading him as a ballroom dancer would his/her partner.

In the next and final chapter, I step back and explore the *bigger picture*, as Patrick earlier pronounces, all is uniquely inter-connected to one another: the agency, the members and participants, the study and myself as an Indigenous collaborative researcher.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

*While making my first walking stick, I've come to realize that the angle of the blade matters. When gently smoothing out embedded knots to create somewhat of a textured, non-adversarial surface along the walking stick, I've learned to work my knife modestly along the wood's plane. This method affords me better results. In other words, by approaching the wooden piece as an opponent and making deeper cuts into it would only cause greater difficulty at a later stage; I would then need to apply more pressure in sanding to a cleaner finish. I learn from this craft that I am not superior to the wood but am relationally in tandem with it. Lastly, in making my stick, I learn to approach this task collaboratively—inclusive of myself, the wood, the artistry and the assistive tools. This teamwork strategy engages Mother Nature; a 'de-barking' knife; an exacta-knife; sandpaper; linseed oil for curing the wood; the rubber cap for the stick's bottom end; and finally, the animal hide and beadwork with which I will be adorning the top 6 inches of the stick's grasp-handle. (Personal Field Note, October 3, 2010).*

### 7.1 General Overview

By reaching deep within our spirit, we can apply learnings in order to self-teach and to not dwell on or repeat cyclical mistakes, as I learned with knife in hand and a roughly-destined walking stick. Past and present WAVS members contributing to this study, Gerry, Freda, Patrick, Donna, White Owl, Melanie, Terry, Ryan, David, Michael, Patsy, M., Roberta, Millie, Stephanie and Stuart as WAVS attendees; Joe, Joyce, Dan, Gail and Leslie as co-facilitators; and Bruce as the former program designer of the Change of Seasons program, all share one goal and that is to keep Warriors Against Violence Society's doors open, as an Aboriginal, culturally-based healing service agency. In this final chapter, I re/visit my/our journey with WAVS, myself as a doctoral researcher, participants and readers as companion travelers. The study has taken us through 4 life stages: getting torn away from one's culture and heritage and land as a child (Earth); feeling hurt, anger and resentment while a child and/or teenager as a result (Fire); realizing as an adult that one's needs were/are not being met; searching for a means of healing, nurturance and growth (Water); and reflecting, in one's elder years, how peace can be gained through reconnecting with the universe around

us (Air). In the section *Learning from the Past*, I provide an historical summation about the effects of colonially imposed demands on Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The participants throughout the project guide me toward *Understanding the Present or rather, understanding in the present*. Something is wrong with our health; the current sales pitch is not working, as Baldrige in Hawaii pointed out to his audience. We need to find a better plan, a re/ignited set of 'wise practices' for contemporary ways of being. Educating our educators may very well be that new way. Questioning not only what our knowledges are but also, the sources from which or from whom those knowledges derive, is a vital first step to transformation, particularly for the multitude of WAVS members who have come and gone over the years, having learned from their program. Looking Towards the Future is a way of wellness for now only ourselves but for our children's children. It is said that we do not take care of Mother Earth for future family members; rather we are borrowing the earth from them and therefore, are indebted to a reciprocal, respectful return of it to future generations. The same is for family violence. With respect, reciprocity, relevance, responsibility and relationality, the abuse toward our Sacred-selves and one another can stop. Following upon discussions about 'what', 'for whom' and 'why' throughout the thesis, *Recommendations* derived from ICR research project address 'how'.

The remaining three sections, *Significance and Contributions*, *Limitations of the Study and Research Implications* each address the 'so what' and 'now what' embedded in the educational process of diminishing domestic violence among many Aboriginal families and communities.

Additionally in this opening contextual section, I emphasize that Western forms of intervention for dealing with Indigenous social problems, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, poverty, homelessness, suicide and homicide, are not entirely effective because they discount the cultural background of the people they aim to aid, reform or transform. On the other hand, through Indigenous Collaborative Research, this study's outcomes can help to re/direct health policies in new ways, such as implementation of greater knowledge about diversity, cultural understandings, worldviews and protocol and finally, actual practice. Indigenous knowledges and culture predominantly seek wholistic approaches to health, as shown by the Medicine Wheel, as a specific exemplar. In this approach, we can examine multiple aspects of our being— spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual—and think of how such factors, past, present and future, throughout our individual and collective life histories, influence our personal conditioning.

Like Zen practices, IK notes a person must lead a spiritually, emotionally, physically

and mentally balanced life in order to prevent illness—rather than waiting for it to happen and then all-out targeting the affected area with cures that seek only to suppress the symptoms instead of deal with the cause. Examples of such superficial solutions include our social security/welfare system of income or 12-step programs that didactically tell participants how to control their behaviours. On the other hand, commonsense ways of healthy living can prevent and deal with all sorts of disease, both individual disease and the larger social dis-ease that affects multiple families and communities.

In Aboriginal culture, ‘good medicine’ can mean self-realization through a creative act, an act of self-expression or of recognizing one’s Sacred-self. As the writer who wrote the introductory poem that opens this dissertation—a poem that explores the origins of my own personal familial traumas—I have also come to see this entire study/dissertation process as the creative act through which I recognize myself as an inherently Aboriginal researcher who contributes to Aboriginal-based initiatives. Colleagues who read anonymized sections of this study are taken aback by participant stories they encounter, such as ‘the man who is 55 and spent 46 of those years institutionalized’ and ‘the woman who had one sibling in residential school and the other in foster care, both thinking the other had fared better... when in truth they had both suffered the same thing [rape] and met the same tragic end [suicide].’ Clearly, these stories show how current, Western-based methods of intervention and punitive correction are inadequate and incomplete; thus, it is all the more vital that health researchers conduct further studies providing evidence that these methods be supplemented with culturally-sensitive, wholistic healing practices that dig deep into history. Participant Donna explains that

*Because the issues are so difficult to deal with, we need a complex program with a director who understands that these abusive behaviours are coming from complex causes—like you can’t say that [participant] is being abusive because his Mom died when he was 2. You can’t say that he’s being abusive because he went to residential school. You can’t say he’s abusive because he’s a recovering drug addict because he was malnourished as a child because he has ADHD. He’s abusive because [of] all these reasons.*  
(February 14, 2011)

As my/our research shows, a significant way to deal with such complex problems is to engage in multiple sites of de/colonization to enact transformational change. ICR that

authentically includes *community/participant privilege, cultural understanding, protocols, generosity, adaptability, trustworthiness and 'behind the scene' activity and creativity* shows how eager participants are to deeply give of themselves to better benefit the next person or family to heal from violent histories. In addition, Indigenous Research Ethics of *respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility and relationality* must be adhered to at all times throughout the research process.

We must also engage non-First Nations peoples with a stake in community development, especially men and women in inter-relational relationships. In Donna's case, she describes herself as *pretty immersed in the Native culture* (December 3, 2010) because of the men she had dated.

*I'd been to a few talking circles already so I understood the concept of why they were set up the way they were and I was comfortable with smudging and praying, so I thought, 'Wow, what a great program.' ... It's terrible when you love someone very, very much but their behavior is so appalling and for me it was incredibly shameful to be involved with this man who was being so abusive -- I didn't tell anybody. (December 3, 2010)*

Her reflections exemplify how WAVS is valued as a tool for healing but might not necessarily benefit people unfamiliar to IK or at least not experienced with some immersion in Indigenous cultures first. Donna understands IK through her relations with Indigenous people—thus her healing is easier.

In conducting this study, I strive to stay true to these principles, particularly when participants trust me enough to share with me intimately difficult stories from their pasts. When White Owl talks about his experiences in jail, for instance, I observe that he is

*very gracious to me and very sincere and authentic in his wisdom and in his time and in his story telling, once again, with me ... I do get a little bold again with my questioning—this time I ask a participant to explain a little bit of what it's like living on the inside of prison. White Owl was graciously forthright and explaining a few things to me in that respect. (Personal Field Note, December 9, 2010)*



A researcher can also use insight to help a participant recognize a negative view towards his or her past. When talking with Patsy, I listen to her describe being schooled with her younger sister and feeling dumb as a result. Since I know Patsy and that in Aboriginal culture, older siblings feel a duty to look after younger siblings, I suggest to her,

*Maybe it's because, whoever made those decisions decided that your little sister needed you.*

*After a moment of thought, she replies, I've never thought of it that way. Yeah. Keep us together because, well, my auntie who is a couple of years older than me and my brother who is a year older than me and then a cousin who is the same age as my brother, they all went together. They probably kept us [me and my younger sister] together so that she didn't have to be by herself. I thought they did that because I was dumb.*

*Hmmm, Now you know differently, don't you? That's certainly a mirror into not only your future but also your past. So way to go! (December 17, 2010)*

It seems to me that using one's own listening skills as a researcher can potentially be an addition to the existing group-based healing model of counseling. In other words, a participant might begin in-group and then engage in individual counseling. Since participants find themselves contributors of their own study as well as knowledge-sharers from whom many others can learn. Encouraging different kinds of sharing circles (e.g. one-on-one versus a larger gathering) can foster a wider range of opportunities for self-reflection.

## **7.2 Learning From The Past**

Here, I wish to echo Hanh's words (2001), as I have come to believe, too, that

We can enter into deep contact with the past through the present.  
That is true of the future too. Normally we say that the future is not here yet but we can touch it right now by getting deeply in touch with the present moment. (p. 45)

Donna shares with me her experiences of healing across time:

*I'm certainly not an expert and I certainly don't want to present myself in that way but because of my struggles with a lot of issues like alcoholism, separation, relationships ending, severe depression and anxiety, co-dependency, depression and anxiety ... I've taken extensive workshops dealing with trauma and recovery from abuse. I took a 6-week program which dealt with healing from abusive relationships ... I've been in counseling and groups for a long, long time. But not anymore. I'm pretty much 2 years free of counseling and support groups. (December 3, 2010)*

In listening to her personal difficulties, I find myself torn between Donna's brave disclosures and coming to terms with some of her language and therefore, veiled systemic attitudes. For instance, she reveals,

*I met my first Native man and that was at [a hotel] up there. I was drinking and he was drinking. We spent the evening together, we both got drunk together, we both went home of course, had sex. (December 3, 2010)*

Despite the best of her intentions, such exoticized words and mannerisms, are indexical to there being something extraordinarily sexy about Native men—which, though some might view it as flattering, amounts to one of many cultural stereotype surrounding the mysterious, mystical 'Other'. Donna continues,

*I discovered very quickly was that every single one of these Native men was messed up, right? Like, they were all heavy drinkers, most of them were smoking pot too. ... Some of them had brushes with the law and they were all very moody and temperamental. ... I was majorly dependent, I was depressed, I was drinking more and more and more and more. I didn't see the dysfunction in it, so I continued to date Native people and I got involved with this one man in particular who was, like, major trouble. (December 3, 2010)*

Donna's first comment seems a typical account of Native people by non-Indigenous people; again, with the focus on what is immediately perceived without taking into consideration socio-historic context. In the second, she appears to equate dysfunction with being with Native men. I ponder, how might such thoughts reify dangerous attitudes? Nevertheless, these interactions and stories highlight a different form of neo-colonial domination, in which a white woman exoticizes Native men and then reproaches them of seducing her by invoking the very stereotypes she pursues, as she describes in her above, last comment.

Eurocentric philosophies of superiority over Canada's First Nations peoples can best be understood in the historical context of government mandated systemic oppression and over a century of racial stereotyping. Violent behaviours that form the basis of such attitudinal stereotypes can be traced back to the residential school system, which still affects many individuals and will continue to do so for many years to come if Western attitudes do not undergo a drastic shift from seeing First Nations peoples as virtually incorrigible beings. Here, we can recall Patrick's simple, yet poignant goal of *learning to be human*.

On the other hand, as White Owl says, Aboriginal people have a responsibility to take ownership of their own healing:

*Maybe they still have that fear, maybe they still have the secrets and they need that push. It helps with accountability. Some people need that push, eh? It's a different kind of saying but when you mess up in life it's for a reason, a kick in the ass could mean a step forward. You need that in life. And they [Joe and Leslie] do it in a gentle way. Because everything they have to say [about their own families] is about violence, too. (December 9, 2010)*

Other groups committed to helping Aboriginal communities end violence can be found across the country, from Alberta Justice's *Impact of Violence on Community Wellness* project (2009); to Nunavut's *National Strategy to Prevent Abuse in Inuit Communities* (2006); to Quebec's *Promoting Non-Violence* initiative (2005). Of the three, only the Alberta Justice report (2009) echoes evaluative participant feedback.

Average tabulated scores showed high levels of satisfaction...Several participants suggested that more opportunities such as this [two day] workshop are needed to support, for example, networking,

examination of the contexts of family violence in First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities, exploration of 'best practices' and compare of programs with a view of potential replication (p. iii)

However, significant goals are similar between the Alberta and Quebec initiatives and the overall theme of this study. The Nunavut Strategy (2006) reports, "Breaking the silence about abuse is the first step. Stating, 'NO MORE!' to violence and abuse is the next. Overcoming obstacles and truly working together will help us reach our goals" (p. 8). Here in British Columbia, we are fortunate to have a community-driven intervention model like WAVS that imparts an understanding of contributing factors of family violence and of the specific cultural/contemporary tools necessary for healing.

### **7.3 Understanding The Present**

To provide services that work, health professionals need an awareness of Indigenous values. Aboriginal communities deservedly demand the same kind of care and understanding as their counterpart recipients of mainstream healthcare. Furthermore, as Aboriginal communities grow in size, strength and voice, it is necessary to recognize their worldviews, such as wholistic healing and the 5 dimensions of the Medicine Wheel, on equal grounds.

We live in an era in which cultural competence and cultural diversity are largely espoused in the educational system and the workplace, though Aboriginal peoples are not the main focus of such beliefs. Rather, interaction with members in a global marketplace is recognized as key to prosperity in the age of international communications. But seldom do we address the need for cultural competence and respect when it comes to dealing with local, marginalized populations. Those who work with Aboriginal populations need to develop their cultural competence when it comes to approaching bands, recognizing the impact of residential schools and implementing wholistic ways of healing.

As well as having the right open-minded attitude towards assistive implementations of wellness, healthcare professionals should also have knowledge of local names, bands, geography, tribes, nations, Aboriginal people with status, on-off reserve populations, Inuit peoples and Métis peoples. They should also be well read on issues affecting Aboriginals: how shelter conditions affect health conditions and how past traumas like residential schools

and systemic racism affect present-day trust of Western medicines, including relations between caregivers and patients.

*It's like anything when you're shopping for someone to deal with you personally, I don't care if it's a hairdresser or a doctor or a support group or getting married. You have to find a match. Or someplace, somewhere where you're at least compatible, where the vibe works for you. I saw many counselors before I finally met [a counselor's name]. And with other counselors I just felt I was putting in time. It's the same with support groups, some you just go [to] and you just show up; you put in time but it doesn't filter out of the group into your life, you know what I mean? Like, you walk out the doors and you leave everything in the room like you never went. But for me, programs like Warriors stick with me when I leave. (February 14, 2011)*

Might an ideal centre for health and wellness be similar to Donna's comparative description above?

## **7.4 Looking Towards The Future**

Within a First Nations cultural paradigm, vision is considered the most intellectual of principles. Visioning First Nations' well-being involves examining the complete picture of health including our Sacred-self, spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual health dimensions. Cardinal and Armstrong (1991) tell us,

The vision is that I will make a contribution. In doing so I will see the greatness in every person and see the aboriginal in every person. My vision is to see every person, not as separate from me but as an inclusion in my own perspective as a part of the human family and to reflect on that. It is how I can serve. (p. 116)

Lee (2000) has this Zen spiritual, yet practical, teaching about vision:

Take the stones and scatter them on a table. What do you see beyond the individual stones? A group of animals in a field? Beans on

a plate? Shells on a beach? Do not limit your visualization to the shape of the stones but include also the pattern they make. (p. 64)

From a relational IK/Eastern perspective, visioning seeks to examine and understand all people, stones, animals, beans and shells. From my doctoral journey—protective walls, squirrels and coyotes, solitude beaches, chronic pain, racism, carved walking sticks and leadership perspectives—of what the ideal state of First Nations health and wellness looked like in the past, does look like contemporarily and needs to look like for the future well-being of our children and grandchildren. In order to envision First Nations' health and wellness, it is imperative to establish a baseline of the extent and causes of Aboriginal peoples' current health situations. It is from that baseline that Indigenous communities can move forward towards the ideal vision of well-being (RHS, 2007). I experience and appreciate my spiritual vision and education as an ancestral gift. It shows me factors of personal and social, negative and positive, my/our physical health, injuries, activities, urban-living, family and foster care, education, employment, mentorship and chronic dis-ease/s. In my commitment to the role of scholar and researcher in my community, by following my vision, I hold close Cardinal and Armstrong (1991) comments, "You learn in the Native ceremony to come to terms with yourself. You don't try to be superhuman or to be non-human. You accept being human. You embrace it" (p. 57).

Some WAVS members' and/or participants' transformation from societal victims to community leaders and educators show the need to continue this study's inquiry, 'How can we heal the violence within many Aboriginal families through a reclamation of traditional values and practices?' Leslie and Terry emphasize their stories as significant turnabouts—both empower others by sharing and offering assistance as co-facilitators/life-coaches/counselling role models. Indeed, the concept of healing transformation involving who, how and why is another potential ICR topic for investigation.

## 7.5 Recommendations

*Our teachers are not books, we rely on local knowledge.*

~ Buffy Sainte Marie (Guest Speaker, UBC, March 5, 2012)

Having addressed how any research-recommendations should be culturally-competent, relevant and useful to Aboriginal peoples and their communities, I now propose

more capacity-building efforts between Aboriginal peoples and educational institutions. My/Our hope is that to be recognized as a legitimate, viable and valuable partnership, with the ethics of *respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility and relationality* in the foreground of all research decisions. Aboriginal peoples' decision-making roles should be encouraged in matters that relate to their families and communities lives; theoretical and methodological approaches to Aboriginal research should, therefore, be predominantly built on Aboriginal worldviews in addition to Western ways. Historically, there has been sustainable evidence of the efficacy of local knowledge, used contemporarily in WAVS, an agency that has been actively serving the community since 1998 and where possible, in many other communities in which we collaboratively live and work. Aboriginal and Western collaborative partners can continue to learn about our inter-connectedness and wholeness, with non-Indigenous research leaders maintaining appropriate conduct and protocol with Aboriginal cultural sensitivities.

Another initiative worth mentioning as a model for future development is the "Supporting Indigenous Children's Development: Community-University Partnership" (Ball and Pence, 2006). Offering an alternative to the imposition of 'best practices' on communities by outside specialists, in their book, the authors tell the story of a partnership initiated by an Aboriginal tribal council and the University of Victoria's School of Child and Youth Care. They have produced a new approach to professional education, in which community leaders are co-constructors of the curriculum and implementation proceeds only if both parties are present and engaged. Word of this generative curriculum has spread to numerous Aboriginal communities; now over sixty communities have participated in the First Nations Partnerships Program. Ball and Pence's innovation has strengthened community capacity to design, deliver and evaluate culturally-appropriate programs to support young children's development. The implementation of such programs seeks to enlist the help of those within the community who have the most influence over the young—namely, their parents. According to Ed John, Grand Chief of British Columbia First Nations Summit, "Fathers may well be the greatest untapped resource in the lives of Aboriginal children today. If we could understand and support them to get involved and stay connected with their children, it would be a big protective factor for these youngsters as they grow up" (Aboriginal Early Childhood Development Leaders Forum, 2010).

Colonial interventions have led to the breakdown of Aboriginal families due to poverty, substance abuse, low self-worth, domestic violence and the incarceration of mostly Aboriginal men, leading to fewer positive male role models for youth. Many children grow up

in single-parent homes where mothers receive little support and struggle to maintain their wholeness. The implementation of programs that genuinely help can reverse these vicious generational cycles. Such programs would encourage paternity recognition (on birth certificates, health records, school records, etc.); move away from mother-centrism in child-rearing; and provide Indigenous men with long-term support in the form of federal and provincial reforms that create more equitable life-conditions (Ball and Manahan, 2010). Families and communities are gaining renewed interest in traditional circles of care for children, adopting the truism that 'it takes a village to raise a child', reinstating teaching and nurturing roles for fathers, uncles and grandfathers as part of an extended family. Consider M.'s story, whose daughters might not be alive today, if not for the sympathetic intervention of her mother-in-law and the extended care assistance by her brother-in-law, when M. became most despondent by the abuse and familial destruction with which she has endured. Many Indigenous men are capable of joining circles of shared care for children and there is an increasing acknowledgement that positive male parenting can have many benefits for children, including better school performance, better self-esteem, higher resilience, a lower risk of depression and stress, positive peer relations and a greater compliance with communal ethics and moral codes (Ball, 2008). The idea that positive father involvement leads to more well-adjusted children has been proven time and again in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies (Richter and Morrel, 2006). Furthermore, helping the healing journeys of Indigenous men can only lead to putting them in a better position to support others in their families and communities.

A stronger partnership between Western and Aboriginal parties in developing community programs needs to be accompanied by a stronger sense of accountability on both sides. Awakening can occur anywhere/time and WAVS represents a successful agency that helps to reinforce and support one's awakening to taking responsibility and to being accountable. Longhouse Teachings at UBC remind me that a circle of people gathered in one place is representative of traditional law. As White Owl observes,

*Warriors Against Violence makes you be accountable, also to take responsibility. I'm at the early stages right now but you know, the more you talk about your problems, get rid of all that controls you, that eats away at you like acid, like cancer, the more you're able to see clear. It's about talking about things, that's the medicine, to be able to do it in a safe, honest environment like Warriors in the circle, that's good. (December 9, 2012)*



## 7.6 Significance And Contribution Of The Study

A respectful researcher seeks to understand Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and ways of healing that are based on the wholistic theory of health. The researcher can then suggest ways to fundamentally incorporate the wisdoms of IK into healthcare practices and social healing practices for Indigenous people. These practices include healing through storytelling; learning from Elders; being connected with nature; having solid community support structures; and re/claiming lost aspects of culture and heritage. Diversity is a common buzzword sounded when universities recruit and corporations hire. But how can we differentiate between paying lip service to diversity and implementing the actions that unsettle the present balance of power? A policy statement on diversity developed by the International Women's Health Programme Committee and approved by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada (2003) online report states, "The SOGC will work towards the removal or reduction of systematic barriers that prevented the participation of minorities, defined as identifiable groups not represented by the dominant culture." However, as a mainstream healthcare organization, it produces a statement more abstract than concrete in its elements. Mission statements of principal health organizations providing services to Aboriginal peoples demonstrate why this study is significant. Health interventions that work for Aboriginal peoples involve more than considering and encouraging. Stronger verbs are needed in action, such as the verb 'to ensure'.

In contrast, WAVS engages members in what Ochocka, Janzen and Nelson (2002) define as Participatory Action Research (PAR) and what I define as the 2 verbs in ICR—*collaborate* and *research*. Below, I provide an interfaced list of research foundations for effective process and discovery that I have adapted from three sources, the methodologies and findings within this doctoral study (2012); Nunavut's National Strategy to Prevent Abuse in Inuit Communities (2006); and Ochocka, Janzen and Nelson (2002):

- Commit to addressing issues that matter to the community: identify important issues, consider possible solutions, and decide on specific actions;
- Create a research team to implement the project: a team approach allows the sharing of responsibilities and rewards, as well as encouraging personal growth for each team person;

- Choose and support good leaders: leaders are critical to success but must be carefully chosen. A good leader has commitment, trusts in others and is good at building alliances and partnerships;
- Recognize the importance of knowledge and of power exchanges: community co-researchers are 'experts' and owners of their own experiences and can shape research questions and suggest ways of collecting information;
- Invest in capacity: successful communities use the skills and knowledge they already have and can develop their capacity by learning from others;
- Ensure face-to-face respectful, culturally-relevant engagement;
- Address space/place, relational ethics;
- Value differences: realize the variety of norms and perspectives. Recognize that difference is essential to creativity and people's well-being;
- Involve nonprofessional researchers in all aspects of the project: by working on different research tasks without hierarchical divisions, all researchers are exposed to the complexity of the research design and research process. It increases ownership of the project, builds skills for all involved and builds supportive networks of people who can work together on issues;
- Hold regular research meetings: training, support, updates, check-ins and clear communication foster a flow of information and feelings of personal growth;
- Network: it is important to inform and invite participation by everyone that is involved in the issue, for example, social services, health services, schools, police, justice officials and elders; and
- Build a foundation of trust and collaboration: active listening, ongoing invitations to collaborate, mutual understanding and meeting people where they are at can help build this foundation.

Almost all of these points foster diversity but I would argue the key philosophy lies in the statement, *Value differences: realize the variety of norms and perspectives. Recognize that difference is essential to creativity and people's well-being.* People do things differently and that should be acceptable. Being allowed to exercise creativity, difference, choice and even disagreement or conflict during the decision-making process is essential to the self-respect and mental/emotional health of the individuals and groups.

WAVS actively demonstrates this active potentiality of helping even more members than they currently do. However, the agency does require collaborative assistance. How can they share their proven capabilities without more deserved funding? How can they continue youth programs that offer immediate safe-havens of generational-specific understanding such as Ryan's ways of listening and mentoring; or providing traditional spirit-honouring activities for women; or safe circles for both men and women to finally disclose their relational terrors? And finally, how can WAVS encourage community adaptations of their model to reach a wider diversity of peoples, worldviews and meaningful intervention strategies? It is from within these very legacy questions that Joe has introduced me to new group members as part of his collective hope for the future.

Returning to the present, as one PAR researcher in Ochoka et al.'s study states: "It was empowering to be asked about my opinions and positions. The leader shared the power through seeking consensus and including all team members in decision making" (p. 381). Another individual expresses, "a benefit was being able to have a voice at our team meetings, to influence decisions ... If I had concerns I could raise them and not only just raise them but the concerns would be valued as well. And often people would always thank me for my comments" (p. 382). In other words, Indigenous research paradigms need to incorporate meaningful involvement of local Indigenous peoples in all phases of the research process; power sharing and bi-directional education between researchers and consumers; mutual respect for diverse provinces of knowledge demonstrated by the team members; conversion of results of research into actual policy, programming and social initiative; and rejection of the traditional standard of research in which participants are treated as passive objects of study (White, Suchowierska and Campbell, 2004). More ICR-based studies can be partnered with agencies like WAVS, where members' views and input are included through every stage of the research, decision-making and healing process.

ICR practices, inclusive of both Indigenous knowledges and methodologies, are not necessarily better but nevertheless evolve differently, than some sub/standard practices of conventional research. What I see as vital to community collaborative initiatives is their proactivity, their insurance that positive and protocol relations are maintained with project partners and community neighbours through regular communication and the development and maintenance of affirmative relationships.

## 7.7 Limitations Of The Study

Like so many other informational facets woven into this written dissertation, through my/our Indigenous wholistic lens, I am able to broach some limitations of both this study and of the agency, Warriors Against Violence Society. However, I preface, WAVS is not in error or deficiency of itself as an appropriate healthcare service provider. Quite the opposite, my final learned articulations about WAVS are meant to endorse the need for more government funding and the need for interfacing Western policies and practices with Indigenous ones; family violence prevention strategies must become more culturally-competent.

Firstly, I emphasize WAVS' culture-specific intervention model as one of its strengths, it would only be fair to recognize that the program's limitations lie in its plausible *non-universal* nature. Both my/our research and WAVS' generalizability across peoples, community organizations and services is in question. Stake (2004) cautions "generalization can be an unconscious process for both researcher and reader" (p. 44). I seek a position along a continuum of generalizability—while the researcher and reader cannot claim that all Aboriginal peoples who have experiences family violence hold the same experiences and perceptions as this study's participants, I/We can infer that their living situations and helpful ways toward recovery could be common. I believe that doing so is beneficial and that considering the participants' stories can lead to a better understanding of the social conditions in which many Aboriginal families live and toward a decrease in structurally violent attitudes and behaviours they face. By showcasing the 22 participants' stories, my purpose has been to illuminate just some of the complexities of past/present/future living and triumphantly healing from lateral abuse.

Though its core value of exercising those healing practices best suited to one's culture, is easily transferable to other communities and ethnicities, the WAVS model would need to be adapted to serve non-Aboriginal populations. Currently, other community agencies that promote WAVS feel the controversy over whether it is 'only' for Aboriginal peoples. Some believe its healing model can be considered universal, appropriate to all forms of violence and not exclusive of one ethnicity over another. Still, the question about the suitability of this particular 'way' of healing for non-Indigenous people, especially those with little or no exposure to Indigenous knowledge theories, remains. Donna, a non-Aboriginal participant in a long-term relationship with Patrick, is enthusiastic about the talking circles and smudging, as she has visited talking circles before joining Warriors and is accustomed to Aboriginal culture due to the men she dated. However, for most non-

Aboriginals, common sense tells us that they would be most open to intervention models that speak to *their* cultures in the same way that WAVS reaches its participants by speaking to Indigenous ways of healing.

Secondly, I feel that my sample of sharing circle participants was too limiting in regards to learning a broader spectrum of participant-knowledge sharing. Three circle contributors are also participants with whom I met individually for our research-based conversations; 1 is an occasional WAVS group member and 2 are the child-minders for WAVS parent-members. Had this methodological component been under a larger funding scale instead of a limited doctoral program, I would have expanded to at least one more sharing circle invitation.

Thirdly, again due to the funding realities of graduate research programs and my own scholarly learning curve, I was unable to broaden my/our research focus to perhaps include gender and sexual orientation underpinnings. Although the WAVS program welcomes individuals and couples of all gender and orientations—there predominately remains a heterosexual emphasis that might implicitly exclude people self-defining themselves as LGBTTTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgendered, two-spirited, queer or intersex), which would bring into question how might such peoples find a comfortable space that facilitates their healing by acknowledging their needs. Does learning Warrior's model of violence intervention hold variant meaning for heterosexual people as opposed to LGBTTTQI peoples? Speaking from within her couple-hood with Patrick, Donna succinctly explains on my behalf. She believes,

*There needs to be more focus on post-violence impact than just strictly focusing on pre-violence. The focus is very much on preventing violence and preventing abuse and I sometimes wish it could focus a little more on what it's like to be with a partner of the abuser. (December 3, 2012)*

Might men and women require different ways of healing? Might they interpret different experiences at and beyond WAVS, from their greater communities? Both specific notions certainly warrant further ICR. Meanwhile, for those members who attend WAVS for the betterment of themselves and their families, the agency seems most appropriate and successful, as we see in Melanie's family of 6, in David's renewed relationships with his grown children and grandchildren and in the 4 year-old child I witnessed, who joins the adult

group for opening smudges for spiritual cleansing with sweetgrass and sage and with prayers.

## **7.8 Research Implications**

Might our embrace of realness, of our Sacred-selves, be the existential, authentic factor that WAVS facilitators and members give to one another—that cannot be gained necessarily through an educational degree? It could be interesting to conduct research into this: the accreditation/impact of institution-‘trained professionals’ at various programs that support Aboriginal peoples.

Over the years, WAVS members have asked for programs that would provide more cultural activities beyond the intervention and prevention model the agency currently offers. Women, in particular, have requested cultural and traditional practices so they can assist themselves and their families to learn healthier ways of being in an urban setting. In response to the women’s vital requests, WAVS has successfully been given grant money to implement its latest short-term program, “Honour Our Spirit”. The program’s purpose is to assist Aboriginal women by exploring their talents, gifts, strengths and culture. Most women who attend WAVS struggle with low self-esteem, feelings of powerlessness and a profound loss of hope. The program, which includes song and drumming, role-playing, theatrical movement and emphatic-voice training provides the means for women and young girls to emerge from this program with a positive sense of worth and greater knowledge about their culture as a path of wellness. Here, I see potential research implications as the need to witness the health benefits of cherished cultural practices such as singing, storytelling, drumming, for example, as more than simply artifacts of entertainment or recreation. Positive action, as suggested by the RHS (2007), explores what has been done to nurture First Nations peoples as individuals and as family/community members and to help them overcome established barriers. This action can include ways to imagine, embark, propel, motivate and emancipate Aboriginal peoples to learn healthier, sustainable life-patterns. Such considerations give rise to the question, Who is best suited to offer adequate and culturally-relevant healthcare assistance to Indigenous peoples regarding, among many other factors, health lifestyle and behaviors, smoking, substance misuse, sexual practices, exercise and nutrition and commonsense? WAVS is and hopes other community support services will too.

Shaping our awareness is crucial to intuitively and collaboratively indexing discontinuity in our lives—for example, the current discontinuity found in many current mainstream health organizations between a largely Aboriginal client population and a largely White staff offering primarily Western ways of treatment. The RHS (2007) refers to awareness and reason as learned knowledge, in which we become reflective, meditative and self-evaluative, so that broader health determinants like culture and history can be examined. Fine tuning awareness and reason (rationale, even questions about ‘why’), involves research about the trends surrounding socio-economic conditions, healthcare housing, income, employment and education among Aboriginal peoples. However, sometimes the absolute ‘whys’ of personal experience remain buried, ignored, and/or incomprehensible as participants discuss about their violent familial lives.

The cross-cultural and social-historical basis of this study has implications for many Indigenous peoples. While not all Aboriginal communities have these same experiences, as I earlier confer, Indigenous peoples throughout the world suffer from externally imposed practices that have shaped their histories. Refusing to let more than mainstream practices or structural violence (Farmer, 1996) play a part in people’s healing growth leads nowhere. Future health research must deal with colonial legacies faced by Aboriginal families in wholistic ways they may have yet engaged, as discussed in my contribution and recommendation sections. For example, in Aboriginal peoples’ cultures, decision-making is foundational, local, and then global. It is often from the local heart knowledge of our Ancestors and present Knowledge Keepers that we first learn, which then transforms into global ways of knowing encouraged and influenced by and for our Sacred-selves, families communities. A more inclusive medical model primarily designed by and for Indigenous peoples is necessary. Just as our Elders and Ancestors have cared for themselves since time immemorial, a return to inter-fused ways of wellbeing is paramount, as each participant elicits in their most intimate of adaptable and relational storywork. Healing can be *like a patchwork quilt ... I mean when I look at my healing quilt there’s counseling, there’s hundreds of groups, there’s one on one with friends, there’s Warriors, there’s Powwows*, says Donna (December 3, 2010). Aboriginal peoples have the right to construct their own healing, their sense of self through a variety of cultures and traditions most meaningful to them instead of being incessantly influenced to forget one set of practices and adopt another in order to advance their lives.

## 7.9 Closing Discussion

To return to Indigenous ways of knowing is not to progress backward. While the Western capitalist system sees progress as a linear development with more advanced technology, greater productivity yields and a larger sphere of influence, Indigenous cultures see progress as returning to timeless practices for health and well-being. However, *no* culture is static; even Indigenous worldviews and cultures continue to evolve. The question is, whether they will evolve in ways that provide the best of interfaced practices from different sources that most benefit the people they serve or whether they will simply become an imprint of the dominant culture infused with local flavours.

The factor that influences development in one way or another is whether there are programs that touch the core issues impacting Indigenous communities. I witnessed the tension between stability and change firsthand during conversations for my Master's degree, with urban-living Aboriginal women living with HIV. Of the 4 women I spoke with, 3 were living in temporary shelters and quite literally, on the go. I thought at the time, *What? Shelters are for thirty days only and then 'bye now', out the door you go?* Contrarily, shelters need to be stable, even among people who come from traditionally nomadic cultures. Even though many First Nations peoples of the Americas were and still are nomadically based on climate and food sources, their yearly cycle of life—their vision and experience of making temporary summer/winter camps—was, in fact, very stable.

By extending this paradox to the 4 quadrants of the Medicine Wheel (spiritual-earth, emotional-fire, physical-water and intellectual-air), we see that different aspects of a person's being, while remaining rooted in Sacred-self-health, is constantly influenced by one another. Spirit-gravitating experiences contribute to learning in significant ways and they have a place in formal educational systems and mind-centred learning. To divide between academe and non-academe would be to deny the influence that different parts of our communities have on each other. Post study/dissertation work, my goal is to make my/our research more accessible in two ways. The first is writing a more 'user-friendly' manual and the second is to explore making an audio to CD recording, with participant readings. Both projects, an anticipated slimmed down versions of a lengthy thesis, would showcase the interventional findings enriched by participants' stories since Indigenous people, who are oral based, find that speaking about their socio-personal issues is the best medicine. In this way, the WAVS prevention and intervention model can be transformed into a written- and audio-mobilized tool kit.



Indigenous applications such as the Medicine Wheel, where we place our inner spirit at the center of the knowledge process and seek balance between its 5 dimensions is paramount to healing from social maladies' of systemic racism, residential school-inflicted traumas, incarceration and community/familial violence. To focus only on the academic mind neglects diverse ways of being (already inclusive of IK) and exhibits a bias toward Western ways of knowing (Anuik, Battiste and George, 2008). We need to balance the cognitive and physical world in which we live with the inner spiritual and emotional journey of our lives. As I have heard from a few Indigenous people now, *we are not human beings born to seek a spiritual journey—we are spiritual beings born to seek a human journey*. For numerous Aboriginal peoples, learning from place is an important source of knowing and being human. It feeds us spiritually, emotionally, physically and mindfully. Certain events, patterns, cycles and happenings occur at certain locations and are readily observable, including animal migrations, cycles of plant life, seasons and so on. The understanding that spiritual presence/s can occupy a particular place provides learning that is qualitatively different from learning as it is currently conceived in most Canadian classrooms. One of the misconceptions we often encounter is the notion that sacred places are few and far between. In actuality, anywhere we happen to be in spirit is sacred (Heavy Head and Blood, 2009). Learning connects learners to place.

To conclude, I take no antagonistic stance to Western knowledges, but rather, propose a harmonious balance between Aboriginal and Western teachings. Reflecting on my walking stick carved 2 years ago, I re/iterate,

*The wood is not an opponent into which I make deep cuts that would require more pressure and sanding to fix the damage. Instead, I need to carve at an angle, gently smoothing out embedded knots to create a calm, non-adversarial surface, working my knife modestly against the wood's plane. The wood is myself; it is but one of the multiple materials that I collaboratively work with, along with a whittling-knife, linseed oil, animal hide and beadwork to adorn the stick's handle. Whether natural or manmade, ancient or modern, all these materials are essential to creating the finished product. What this act of creation, self-realization or 'good medicine' teaches me is this: Aboriginal peoples can and must, reclaim their culture and develop diverse tools, rituals and practices to heal from 8 generations of dis-ease and re/maintain our individual and societal well-being.*

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## Appendices



## Appendix A: WAVS Letter Of Support

UBC Ethics Research Board  
#102, Technology Enterprise Facility III  
6190 Agronomy Road  
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z3

September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010

To whom it concerns;

Warriors Against Violence Society has been in operation since 1998. The mandate of the organization is to address issues of violence and abuse and to provide a means to stop violence using the WAVS model. The model incorporates cultural teachings, short term tools to prevent violence and a circle to share stories of past experiences to help understand where the roots of anger originate from.

On behalf of the WAVS organization, I have invited Donna Lester-Smith, a UBC Métis PhD Candidate to inquire with us, about our prevention and Intervention model we facilitate to lower the incidences of family violence among many Aboriginal communities.

This past year Donna Hill has worked with Warriors Against Violence Society on a research project: ***“Hope for Change—Change Can Happen”: Healing the Wounds of Family Violence through Indigenous Traditional Wholistic Practices***

She has contributed much to the program by means of providing hope, support and encouragement. She has not only demonstrated respect for participants but for the traditional teachings and the WAVS model. She makes clear her role in the program to the participants by explaining what her research is about. She also demonstrates her understanding of violence and abuse by means of sharing her own knowledge and experience.

As an organization that has struggled to get funding due to policy restraints, we hope that research such as this demonstrates a need for change so effective programs can continue to provide services addressing violence in the Aboriginal community. Donna’s research about *an Aboriginal holistic intervention model found to be effective for diminishing domestic violence(DV) within Aboriginal Communities* is critical to bringing attention to practices that cultivate a process to end the cycle of violence.

Donna offers many years of practical, academic and research experience in developing, implementing and directing projects and other activities related to the health field. She conveys a passion not only for her work in the health field but a passion for the Aboriginal community. I believe that it is essential to continue to do research that may facilitate change in health policies. Donna’s research may help to address a gap in health services for the Aboriginal community. Therefore, I am pleased to provide a letter of reference for Donna Hill. I highly recommend that you consider her application.

Sincerely,

Joyce Fossella, Executive Director

## Appendix B: Letter Of Initial Contact

### Who is doing this Research?

**Donna Lester-Smith:** I am an *Algonquin/Métis* student at UBC, completing a PhD program in Indigenous Education. I would like to learn about Warriors Against Violence Society (WAVS), their Aboriginal wholistic intervention model, and how it helps to end family violence within many Aboriginal communities.

### With Support from WAVS

**Joyce Fossella:** I am a member of the *Lil'wat Nation* in British Columbia and have worked in First Nations communities in education, employment, and health fields. As one of the four Co-Facilitators, and as Executive Director at WAVS, I am helping to address family violence.

Together, we want to share with many other Aboriginal families, how WAVS teachings may be helpful to heal from violence.

### If you have questions or comments about this project please contact:

Researcher, Donna Lester-Smith  
Phone: 604-910-8966

Supervisor, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald  
Phone: 604-822-5286

If you are concerned about your rights as a participant in this project, please contact:

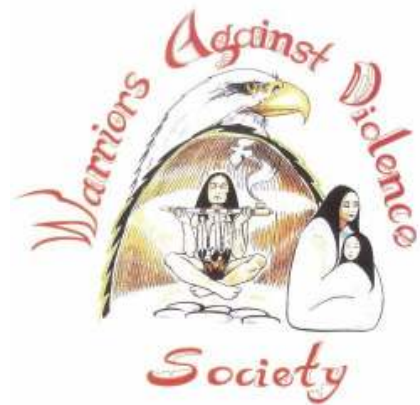
Director of Research Services  
University of British Columbia  
Phone: (604) 822-8581



University of British Columbia (UBC)

### You are invited to participate in a project called

***"Hope for Change—Change Can Happen": Healing the Wounds of Family Violence with Indigenous Traditional Wholistic Practices***



November 25<sup>th</sup> 2010

### What is this Project About?

WAVS co-facilitators and I want to understand more about violence in many Aboriginal families. In particular, the specific cultural ways that WAVS offers you, as a client, to understand anger and to heal from family violence.

\*

Our goal is to learn from Aboriginal men and women's stories of family violence so that you, WAVS, and I, can help improve the health and well-being of many Aboriginal family members.



### If You Decide to Join this project I will:

Talk with you for 30 to 60 minutes

### Can I tell you more about this project?

If you want to know more about this project please ask any of the WAVS co-facilitators or call Joyce Fossella at 604-255-3240. They will refer your contact information to me so I can get in touch with you.

You may also call me, Donna Lester-Smith, at 604-910-8966

\*

*Thank you for your time!*

### If You Volunteer

You can leave the project at any time for any reason.

### To Ensure Your Privacy:

- I **will not** use your name in any reports written about the project.
- I **will not** use any information that could identify you or anyone else.
- I **will ensure** that WAVS facilitators and clients, or any other community agencies you have contact with **will not** have access to any identifiable information you share with me.
- I **will store** all information you share with me in a locked research office.

November 25<sup>th</sup> 2010

## Appendix C: Consent Form For Participants

### THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Faculty of Education  
Departments of Indigenous Education and  
Centre for Cross Faculty Inquiry  
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4

#### Research Project

“Hope for Change—Change Can Happen” - Healing the Wounds of Family Violence with Indigenous Traditional Wholistic Practices

#### Researcher

Donna Lester-Smith (PhD Candidate)

#### University Supervisor

Dr. Jo-ann Archibald (Associate Dean for Indigenous Education)

#### Consent Form for Warriors Against Violence Society (WAVS)

##### What is this Project About?

I am an *Algonquin/Métis* student at UBC, completing a PhD program in Indigenous Education. I would like to learn about Warriors Against Violence Society (WAVS), their Aboriginal wholistic intervention model, and how it helps to end family violence within many Aboriginal communities. In partnership with you (WAVS), my research explores your Aboriginal wholistic anger and violence intervention model that teaches Aboriginal men and women how their health and well-being may be influenced by society’s historical, political, and economic contexts that often destroy Aboriginal families through violence. In particular, I am looking at the specific tools that WAVS offers you and other clients to heal from family violence within Aboriginal communities.

The goal of this project is to learn from Aboriginal men and women’s stories of family violence so you, WAVS, and I can help improve the health and well-being of many Aboriginal family members. I will share our learned knowledge with people in charge of healthcare policy-writing and healthcare providers.

##### What does this Project Involve?

To understand more about violence in many Aboriginal families, I will be talking with past and present WAVS clients, and WAVS co-facilitators. You and I can speak alone and at your convenience. The length of our conversation will depend on your availability but might average of 30 to 60 minutes. I will ask for your permission for me to digitally record our conversation together so that I can have it transcribed into written form. If you volunteer in this project, at any point during our conversation, you can ask for the recorder to be turned off or have the recording erased. I will later give you a copy of your stories shared with me, and ask you if there are any additions you may like to add, or concerns that you may want changed or deleted.

##### Benefits and Risks

There are no risks to your health from being in this project. The benefit of being in the project will be in helping health care workers and policy makers to learn more about how to make health and services better for Aboriginal people. You do not give up any of your legal rights when you sign this consent form.

## Protecting Your Privacy and Confidentiality

I will keep what you tell me private, and will protect you in several ways:

1. I will not use your name in the project or in any reports or papers written about what we have learned from you. Instead, you can choose an anonymous name for yourself, or, we will give each person in the project a number code.
2. You will not be identified in any of my discussions with other healthcare providers and project participants.
3. I will delete any information that could point to you or any other people you mention when I prepare digital recordings into typed transcripts, written records, and notes.
4. Employers, managers, or other service providers will not have access to any of the information you provide.
5. The research team members (Dr. Archibald, and me, Dr. Cole and Dr. Gill, the other two university committee members who are guiding this project, and the typist who will be transcribing yours and my recorded conversation together) will be the only people who will see the research information. All of these people have agreed to keep all information in strict confidence.
6. I will store all information you share with us in a locked cupboard within a research office at UBC.

I will be sharing any results of this project in written reports and papers, and where helpful, at meetings. The research information will be kept for at least five years after the research is completed. When the research information is no longer used, it will be destroyed.

## Consent to Participate

Your choice to be in the project is up to you. Your choice to participate in this project will not affect any healthcare employers, managers, services, or funding contributors associated with WAVS or any other community organizations. If you choose to be in the project, and then change your mind, you are free to drop out of the project at any time.

If you have any questions about your rights as part of this project, you can contact the Director of University of BC Research Services and Administration, in Vancouver at (604) 822-8581.

If you have questions or comments about this project, you can contact me at 604-910-8966, or, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald at 604- 822-5286.

To thank you for choosing to be part of this project, I will give you a traditional honourarium of \$25.00 and a small personal gift.

When you sign this consent form, you agree to take part in this project. I will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please sign your name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please print your name

## Appendix D: Demographic Form



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

### Demographic Form

#### Research Project

“Hope for Change—Change Can Happen” - Healing the Wounds of Family Violence with Indigenous Traditional Wholistic Practices

#### Researcher

Donna Lester-Smith (PhD Candidate)

**This questionnaire allows me to know general information about you and other participants assisting me with this study. Your name will be kept anonymous at all times.**

Where do you live? (City area)

What is your age?

What is your ancestral heritage?

Do you have a home-community you revisit?

Do you speak your original family/community language?

Who were your birth family members?

Who were you raised by (1 or 2 parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, foster parents)?

Who is a part of your family today?

Are you presently in a relationship with a spouse or a partner?

How long have you been attending WAVS?

What is your occupation?

What is your total household income (under \$20,000, under \$30,000, over \$30,000, over \$40,000)?