‘Niit nüüyu gwa’a: Deconstructing Identities

by

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Abstract

Hadiksm Gaax di waayu, I belong to the Ganhada (Raven Clan) and my Mother's side of the family is from Gitxaala, we follow our Mothers. This research, writing, and data collection was done on the traditional unceded territories of the Tsimshian, Lheidli T'enneh, and Musqueam. This work was done in partnership with the people who shared their stories with me, the co-researchers, whose words provide a brief glimpse into the lived experience of First Nations identity and the thought processes involved in contemplating several sources of input informing how we think about identity. Stories of identity, perceptions of identity, and experiences of racism and discrimination have inspired this work and highlighted the need for engagement. This research is a validation of thought processes that surround how we, First Nations people, experience identity. A shift away from Western conceptualizations of identity, this research discusses experiential knowledge, racism and discrimination, impacts of racial microaggressions on self-perceptions and health, and a sampling of how some people have come to define their identity in their own way based on their experiences. The intent of this work is to both inform those who may not understand and to acknowledge and validate those who have thought about First Nations identity but do not have a safe space to share. I hope this work speaks to both First Nations and non-First Nations/Settler Canadians as we continue learning about one another and sharing with each other in the spirit of reconciliation.

Chapter 1: Introduction

First Nations people, Indigenous, Aboriginal, Status Indian, Second Generation Cut-off, off-reserve, 6(2), member, non-treaty. This is what they call me.

Tsimshian and non-Indigenous, Daughter, Wife, Mother, PhD student. ***'Niit nüüyu gwa'a, this is who I am.***

The research and conversations in this dissertation are on First Nations identity, experiences from those possessing this identity, and how the First Nations people involved in this work see their place in society. With recent shifts toward reconciliation, a dialogue about the experience of identity for diverse communities in Canada is essential. Each day, whether in a passing conversation, in the course of my work, or in the questions I'm asked about my research, I witness the growing curiosity and genuine interest of those around me who want to engage in discussions about reconciliation, cultural learning, and wanting to know more about the shared history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.

The last few years contemplating what it is/means to be Indigenous, First Nations, Tsimshian woman is a far-cry from the early days of my identity exploration in the face of racism and discrimination. The growing respectful dialogue and motivation I have seen in those around me to learn more about First Nations culture, traditional territories, languages, and the complexity of status has carried me through this work. In response to this growing trend of building awareness, I undertook this research to capitalize on the

momentum and hunger I witnessed during the writing of my master's thesis. My intent has been to write on the lived experience of First Nations identity in such a way that even those without the experience but with an interest to understand can gain information through reading this work.

Stories shared here illuminate a small sample of First Nations identity experiences. This work is not an all-encompassing general knowledge course on diverse experiences of identity for First Nations. Furthermore, this research is not intended as an attack on or victimization of First Nations identity(ies); rather, I hope to contribute to a dialogue on the gaps in identity literature that fail to address the unique experience of group identity defined by an external/opposing body, the federal government of Canada. For this reason, the research here does include experiences with *Indian Act* eligibility criteria on *Status*. The *Indian Act* is the foundation upon which the state defines and controls the lives of First Nations people; this needs to remain part of the conversation.

An overarching goal of this research has been to introduce lived experience into current conversations on Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations in Canada. Non-Indigenous Canadians are experiencing a range of emotions around unearthing a dark history of our country. Some are angry to learn what they do not know, some are afraid of what unearthing some truths from the past will mean, some are excited for new learning or are hopeful that others are learning about their lived experience now, and then there are those who are not ready for or do not see the value in talking about the past. Much of the truth being revealed in our shared colonial history takes aim at deeply rooted axiology and status quo day-to-day understandings that have long gone unchallenged. Each of these groups of people are important and have every right to feel the way they do. I also

recognize the level of awareness of our shared history in Canada and the varying degrees of acceptance over how that shared history flows intergenerationally. What we cannot forget to acknowledge is the dark and harmful legacy of a colonial history built upon tenets of racist and elitist values held by the founding fathers who were products of their time. This, however, is not an excuse for ignorance but a reason to educate ourselves for the purpose of doing better together.

> It is a potent mixture: anger about the past; profound alienation from the Canadian mainstream; a growing foundation of educational and professional achievements; legal power; and frustration with both Aboriginal leadership and persistent government influence over Indigenous affairs. Then add in: the legal and political victories, mostly over the Government of Canada; growing economic independence; cultural achievements; and the international recognition of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Out of this emerges Idle No More, a movement born out of this matrix of crisis and empowerment, despair and accomplishment, historical legacies and contemporary achievements. (Coates, 2015, p. 5)

Too little consideration has gone toward the diverse lived experience of First Nations people in Canada while far too much effort goes toward the denial of history laden with requests to “get over it.” Ensuring space for reflexive practice and engaging in hard conversations will facilitate mutual understanding and current reconciliation efforts. In my opinion, Canadian society (for the most part) struggles in conversing on Indigenous issues because there is a resistance toward reflecting on our shared history of colonization, which remains a barrier to reconciliation. The complexity of the shared long-term relationship (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) that is unique to Canada has

contributed to the longstanding misconceptions and divisions I still witness today. The intent of this research is to share the lived experience of a people who possess an identity with complexities created by the federal government; an identity that ranges from being a meaningless addition to how a person defines their identity to a painful reminder of colonization.

The influence of Indian Act Status is intentionally convoluted. It is necessary to understand the history of the relationship First Nations people have with the government of Canada, *Indian Act* legislation, and modern impacts of a shared painful history. For this reason, the research that follows was about far more than Status alone. Following a discussion on the past will be learnings and ways of knowing/being shared by the co-researchers who informed this work. Herein is a conversation about identity for First Nations people that is unknown to many, denied its significance, and often unsafe to have in the open. This research presents the experiences the co-researchers have lived when a state subjugates a group of people so far as to define their identity criterion. Within the narratives, you will also witness personal experiences that have shaped the ways of knowing and being First Nations people in Canada today.

My previous research focused on experiences of Status loss for First Nations women and how they felt toward eligibility criteria within the Indian Act. One of the emerging themes in that work was termed *Internalized Legislation* (King, 2011) where internalizing *Indian Act* eligibility criteria for being Status or Non-Status manifests as an invisible measuring stick of "Indianness." While the commentary around the *Indian Act* states the different categories of status only intend to label someone's ability to transmit status or not, the widespread notion of being less than, half, or simply not enough,

permeates within communities. The divisive nature of the *Indian Act* has, for some, become internalized to some extent, this finding was apparent in the findings of my Masters dissertation on Status loss (King, 2011). Co-researchers in my previous research identified mechanisms around internalizing identity legislation and how the government is not the only contributor to sustaining the significance of eligibility criteria. With time, status has become a defining mechanism of members within Nations and sometimes within family units. Co-researchers involved with my research revealed that, over time, they had experienced this form of internalized legislation at the hands of their own people. In one woman's experience, the adverse impacts of internalizing status identity came from family members. This woman revealed that upon her mother's marriage to her non-status father (prior to 1985), her uncles and the RCMP escorted her mother off the reserve. At the time, she was no longer considered a member of her Nation because marrying a non-status person caused a First Nations woman to be ineligible for status (King, 2011). This reveals the nature by which status operated prior to 1985 and, even with amendments Bill C31 and Bill C3, status transmission is still dependent upon the status of parents today.

This control over and inequality ignited by Status alongside the inability to transmit status beyond two generations of intermarriage with non-First Nations people or those who do not carry status, reveals the marginalization First Nations people, women, and communities face; this is the impetus behind this research. Lived experience having an identity partially defined through the Indian Act sheds light on the feelings of marginalization that is maintained through legislation. This marginalization manifests through social inequalities and is compounded by silence on the issues that perpetuate

disparities we still see today in 2019. The major concern here is to understand how marginalization influences not only how someone understands their identity but also how they think about the values tied to who they are as a person.

Burbank (2011) takes a perspective of considering identities that may be marginalized and how that feeling may impact an individual's perception of their place in society. In other words, someone who may be in what is perceived to be a lower socio-economic status (SES) may feel marginalized, which can have an adverse impact on health. This is what Burbank refers to as objective indicators of SES and can occur in situations where a particular group of society is a minority and experiences marginalization to some extent. This marginalization can occur in many forms, but those highlighted by Burbank are 'spotlights' placed on groups by both the media and by federal government policy. Burbank states that with the existence of these 'spotlights,' any gap between groups in society may in fact become exacerbated and attention is often focused on the negative characteristics associated with the marginalized group (2011). Exacerbating the health and socioeconomic gaps in Canada between First Nations people and non-First Nations people is highly emotional and, in my opinion, very dangerous.

The experience of stress also comes up when we think about identity and health, as Burbank (2011) notes, having that experience over time can have serious and long-term impacts:

> When we are repeatedly frustrated because our resources provide us with inadequate means for achieving valued goals, there is a greater likelihood we will experience relative deprivation, harmful stress, and consequent ill health. (Burbank, 2011, p. 127)

We live in a society where a line exists between First Nations people and non-First Nations people and distinctions guide interactions while one group identity has been and still is devalued. This devaluation of an identity prevents the achievement of what Maslow termed the hierarchy of needs for optimal human existence. First, there are basic needs that include safety, food, and housing. Higher-order needs are only a priority once basic needs are met: self-esteem, self-actualization, and functional autonomy. To satisfy human needs, each one needs to be achieved (Maslow, 1970). My focus here is on the attainment of self-esteem, autonomy, and self-actualization and on understanding the extent of the negative impact (stress) from not achieving these needs.

Significance of the Research

> To be federally recognized as an Indian either in Canada or the United States, an individual must be able to comply with very distinct standards of government regulation… The *Indian Act* in Canada, in this respect, is much more than a body of laws that for over a century have controlled every aspect of Indian life. As a regulatory regime, the *Indian Act* provides ways of understanding Native identity, organizing a conceptual framework that has shaped contemporary Native life in ways that are now so familiar as to almost seem "natural." (Lawrence, 2003, p. 3)

Current thought and theories on identity do not meaningfully address the unique experience of identity for First Nations people in Canada. For years, the field of psychology has worked to explain identity (personal, social, relational), its development over time, and various measures to determine achievement levels. At the same time, the field has yet to address identity for a specific group of people with the lived experience of

identity defined by the state: the federal government of Canada. Thus, identity confusion or denial of status for First Nations people has not been a topic in mainstream identity research. Current research states that denial of identity and rights associated with identity are known to reduce well-being and perpetuate identity confusion (Waterman, 2007). Waterman's (2007) research identified that the consideration of identity and identity alternatives was in fact a determinant of well-being. What is missing from the literature, and what this research will address, is the further complication of *Indian Act* status and identity as determined through eligibility criteria in Canada.

The predominant investigation within this research is the distinguishable intersection of identity constructs and how they compete, work together, or complicate First Nations' understanding around identity. The overarching focus of this work is the concept of status, which determines social inclusions, exclusions, and conflicts arising from status identity and how these constructs challenge the more fluid notion of identity. Furthermore, are these intersecting definitions of identity salient to the individual; if they are, what are the thought processes around the competing definitions and what have individuals done to reconcile possible experiences of cognitive dissonance around how they define their identity? A main contributor to the intersecting definitions of First Nations people is the paternalistic control within the Indian Act in defining eligibility criteria for who is or is not an Indian. The *Indian Act* dates to 1876 and within it is defined who an Indian is, how you are classified based on parent status, and the eligibility criteria that regulates transmission of status to children. Beyond legislation, another competing definition of First Nations people's identity comes from mainstream society's perceptions and limited exposure to actual First Nations people in day-to-day life. For

these folks, limited exposure often means learning definitions and perceptions through widespread media or through other trusted (not necessarily accurate) sources.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The *Indian Act* of 1985 (AANDC, 2012), but dating back to 1876, is central to this research because it is the unique characteristic that determines the lives of First Nations people in Canada. The Indian Act outlines rights and restrictions of daily living, reserve life, funding, housing, sales, and identity (to name a few) of First Nations with Indian Status, both on and off reserve. The purpose of the document is to define the relationship Indians would have with Canada. Unfortunately, the Act neglected input from First Nations people; it remains an archaic and colonial piece of legislation that hinders true relationship building in the 21st century. Rights and restrictions imposed by the government have become normalized and internalized by both First Nations people and white-settler Canadians.

This research explored First Nations people's identity, Canadian government legislation and policy on Identity, and impacts on well-being through the following primary research questions:

1. How do First Nations people define the notion of status?
2. How do First Nations frame the impacts of having or not having status as part of their identity?

These overarching questions were addressed through the interview protocol found within the methods section. Working through the interview questions as a conversation revealed an understanding of the role played by the *Indian Act* and impacts it has on identity when

it comes to well-being or other parts of life for First Nations people. It has long been known that the Indian Act legislation determining who is or is not an "Indian" comes from a Euro-centric value system that does not recognize traditional frameworks used prior to contact. This disconnect relates to how identity was and still is conceptualized by First Nations people as opposed to how it has been conceptualized by the Canadian federal government. The ability to self-determine identity is invaluable to First Nations people and non-First Nations people alike.

Identity is the focus of this research in order to elucidate the intersections of competing definitions and perceptions that shape how an individual perceives their identity and the group with which they associate. The competing definitions and perceptions of First Nations people's identity made this research complex and deeply personal, which serves to convey the struggle of identity for First Nations people in Canada. Most importantly, this research treads lightly so as not to engage in a process that will make individuals feel as if they have been targeted or othered. Essentially, this work utilizes understandings of identity and knowing the self from both Indigenous Knowledge and Eudaimonia[1], but with the upfront complexity and intersectionality that comes from individual identity, self-understanding, social/colonial perceptions, and Indian Status. To understand the mechanisms behind feeling othered it is important to understand the function of othering to the extent which it informs us about ourselves and others.

The "other" is a social construct used as a way of differentiating the self from others. Since the first use of the construct of "the other" with Simone De Beauvoir in

[1] A term first coined by Aristotle in his Nichomachean Ethics to explain the value of living to your true self in order to achieve happiness (Waterman, 2007).

1949, the other, othering, and otherness, has rooted itself in commentary of "us and them" (Brons, 2015). Simone De Beauvoir first engaged with the concept of "the other" in her book, *The Second Sex*, in 1949, wherein the French existentialist is often credited for bringing about second-wave feminism. De Beauvoir's focus on gender and "othering" is considered to have been a significant addition to feminist philosophy. Brons (2015) does note that Hegelian roots of "othering" claim that this takes place each time there is an "encounter between two intelligent, interpreting creatures" (p. 70). This is relevant to the conversation in this research because the "othering" that does occur for First Nations people, often lacks real understanding and awareness. Targeting or othering only serves to focus on the difference in other people and possibly use that information against or to further devalue diverse others. Coates (2015) alludes to othering and misunderstanding in his book, *#IdleNoMore and the Remaking of Canada,* when he said that we experience each other, but real understanding is tragically elusive. I have aimed to address the elusiveness of mutual understanding through my data collection and this final written piece.

Initial thoughts linking identity and health regarding self-esteem and self-continuity exist in the research (Kirmayer et al, 2000), but a gap specifically addressing Indian Act identity to understand impacts on well-being still does not exist in the literature. In other words, the link has been discussed but with insufficient evidence for the case of First Nations people's identity and how it may relate to or affect their well-being. This research was designed to illustrate the essence of being First Nations, possessing and developing identity while tackling status complications, and thoughts around disclosing identity to others.

Background of the Study

> I've read a lot of books about Indigenous peoples, and it seems every single one spends some time explaining which term the author will use in the rest of the text, and why he or she chose that particular term. I've tried avoiding that sort of thing when talking to people, but it absolutely always comes up. (Vowell, 2016, p. 7)

This research explores First Nations people's identity within several opposing contexts: the personal, the social, and the political/legal. First Nations people's identity and the politics which define and direct our understandings can be confusing and subjective. For these reasons, the terminology used in this work will reflect terms used in cited resources or default back to First Nations people when working beyond cited resources. This research progresses with a focus solely on those who have or have lost Indian Status because of the *Indian Act*. While I do not directly address the Métis or Inuit Peoples' experience of identity, I want to validate the equally troubling and complex experience of their identities. The reasoning for not addressing the identity experience of the Métis and Inuit is simply due to my lack of understanding and lived experience of their identities. Out of respect for those that have provided me with guidance, I will not extend the findings of this dissertation to the Métis and Inuit experiences of understanding and journeying towards a definition of identity.

This work is my lived experience of possessing a First Nations identity and the lived experience of the co-researchers who shared their stories with me. My story is one of being unable to transmit status to my children and my curiosities around how that makes me feel and how it has affected my way of walking in this world. This work is

both an exploration of the convoluted definitions of status within the *Indian Act* alongside the common misperceptions of what status really is and how it impacts First Nations people. These societal perceptions of my identity had a deep impact on my holistic wellness for a long time, it is the experience I know and associate with most closely. For this reason, I restricted my focus to Status and non-Status First Nations people as it is the story I know. The research questions specifically address feelings toward the *Indian Act* and if it contributes to personal identity definitions.

You will see the word *Indian* in discussions stemming from the *Indian Act* of 1985 and its predecessors, to maintain consistency with the legal jargon utilized by the Canadian government. The use of this term (that did not exist prior to colonial contact) is also indicative of the misunderstanding of identity between First Nations people and the federal government. Occasionally you will read specific Band names or First Nations people by their actual name, most people involved in this work overwhelmingly prefer this. When addressing points relevant to the larger group I will use Indigenous and Aboriginal interchangeably as they are used in various sources. These terms reflect different realities of diverse First Nations people internationally and within Canada respectfully. I draw upon literature that utilizes this terminology. Alternative use of these terms may be to describe the Indigenous philosophy and methodology proposed in this research. The need for explanation is reflective of the convoluted nature of identity for First Nations people in Canada. Naming is critical while doing this work, due in part to the need to highlight history and changes that have come through attempts to define, identify, and group all Indigenous Peoples together. If a particular name or term is used,

it is typically to respect the usage in a particular source or a term used by the co-researchers informing this work.

A final note on terminology around the use of people and peoples in this work. Peoples is deliberately used when the intention is to draw awareness to the diversity of First Nations people both within their groups and between groups across the country. A granular understanding is necessarily in order to capture the diversity among the more than 600 unique First Nations people (Indian Bands) in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017).

To be born Indigenous is to be born political.

I hear this phrase more often than not and it speaks to the social environment in Canada for First Nations people. How can an individual automatically be born into politics because of who they are? This statement had little to no role in my life until I undertook identity exploration in my mid-twenties. Now it is a daily thought in the back of my mind: I am First Nation and I am political because I had a relationship with the government as soon as I was born. In fact, I would argue that I was political before I was born due to the identity of my parents and grandparents. The political/legal component to identity is where the term Indian persists and continues to be used. There are individuals who identify as an Indian, this decision should be equally acknowledged and respected. The commentary about what to call a group of people is inherently contentious for First Nations due to the complicated history of having external definitions imposed upon us. Prior to contact, First Nations people knew one another by their names and groups. In many instances, naming of peoples is inextricably linked to the land. Here I will provide an example of who I belong to and the people on whose traditional territory I completed this work:

Tsimshian – *People of the River of Mist or People of the Skeena*

Lheidli T'enneh – *The People where the two rivers flow together*

Beyond politics, identity impacts upon my interactions with others, breeds thoughts on the transmission of status[2] identity to children (before having children), and draws negativity from some who do not understand the implications of First Nations identity politics. The struggle to define and express identity is more painful when reflecting on how First Nations people have ancestors who called these lands home since time immemorial. Canada is a country struggling with deep colonial roots that facilitate processes of othering and thinking less of those who are culturally distinct from the majority. This marginalization, in the form of stereotypes, myths, and misunderstandings passed down through generations, is both strong and invisible to those without the lived experience of being on the margins.

A colonial legacy shielded from the public eye perpetuates the marginalization of First Nations people. As a First Nations woman, I have witnessed real world examples of identity being the first and only thing noticed about someone. If Hegel was right, this initial appraisal of peoples we come into contact with something unavoidable in human interaction (Brons, 2015). Although, I would argue that differences are only salient because society has indoctrinated people into this way of thinking since approximately the 18th century:

> "This division of *Homo sapiens* into race taxons started in the 18th century, when the sciences of genetics and evolutionary biology were not yet invented. These

[2] Status is determined through the *Indian Act* by eligibility criteria. A person with 6(1) status is someone with parents who possess status. Someone classified as 6(2) has one parent with status and one without status, someone defined as 6(2) is unable to transmit status to children unless they co-parent with another person defined as 6(1) or 6(2).

> disciplines have since shown that human race taxonomy has no scientific basis. Race categories are social constructs, that is, concepts created from prevailing social perceptions without scientific evidence. Despite modern proof that race is arbitrary biological fiction, racial taxons are still used widely in medical teaching, practice, and research (Witzig, 1996).

How we define ourselves is an internal process supported by several pieces of information that coalesce into our whole being (Erikson, 1980). For First Nations people, this information includes geography/territory/nation, familial ties, and roles/responsibilities. In my personal experience, I have had my identity challenged by the external and competing factors of Indian Act eligibility and appraisal of my identity by others (social perceptions, judgments, conclusions made based on phenotype and stereotypes). Many pieces of information make up my identity, I often worry that other key parts that make up my identity may be at risk of going unacknowledged once cultural identity arises, not at risk for loss, but at risk of not being important or relevant to others as they obtain social information about me. Introducing myself by traditional name and territory does come with some inherent risk, but a risk that is well worth an opportunity to educate while revealing identity. In previous exchanges, I have become an Indian in the eyes of some and external perceptions of my cultural identity become who I am…

> *Jessie is an Indian.*

In extreme situations, it is the topic of several future conversations with the same individual or it comes up with good intentions. While overt racism is typically not socially condoned, covert racism may come in the form of racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions are sometimes subtle, stunning, and often automatic non-verbal

exchanges which are put downs of minorities by offenders of the dominant culture. While overt racism is seen as destructive, covert microaggressions are even more insidious (Pierce, 1970; 1974; Solorzano, 1998).

> "Good for you, you look just like an Indian Princess! You should be so proud of yourself!"

A stranger made this comment to me at the Convocation for my master's degree in 2011. I stood wearing my button blanket, having my picture taken, when a woman came out of a crowd to say this while petting/stroking my head. It was belittling, uncomfortable, and I came away enraged at the racial undertone of what was a poor attempt at a compliment. For a long time after, I was concerned that I was being overly sensitive and became angry that I let this exchange dampen the day. However, it is important to recognize that those who are victims of racism become sensitized over time to subtle nuances, code-words/phrases (e.g., "You people…"), body language, averted gazes, and exasperated looks that send an insidious attack of racial microaggressions whether the intent is there or not (Solorzano, 1998). Occasionally, cultural identity disclosure paves the way to a scenario for questions, tokenism, and representing a group of people. There are so many questions, comments, and racial microaggressions to field and respond (or not respond) to once cultural identity is revealed. I have witnessed, first hand, interactions where others discover my identity and frame their conversation solely on that information about who I am. This manifests through questioning on my identity, tokenism (ie. Being asked questions about or expected to speak on First Nations related topics). For this reason, I ask the reader to consider how racial microaggressions influence and impact identity, as you move through reading on this research.

Spokespeople are those identified as representative of a group. They become informants to both represent and defend a whole group of people; they are the token individual that is responsible for explaining all the beliefs of a group of people. A spokesperson is expected to account for an entire community, speak to all the negative (and some positive) driven questions of people whether or not they are close in proximity or from the same group. All of this is perceived as a completely reasonable request of First Nations people by many Canadians of European descent.

The sociology of race has not yet achieved an understanding of the "visceral and embodied nature of racism" upon which racism is built (Clark, 2015, p. 199). In fact, race, racism, and discrimination focus solely on the victim and not on those who have the power and privilege to inflict these harms. As Patricia Monture (2007) states, the legal concept of discrimination actually puts the focus on people who experience discrimination and oppression. Those denied rights and services or excluded are the ones who have to speak against discrimination. We do not stop to consider the privilege given to those that hold the power to discriminate because society lays the burden of proof on victims of discrimination. This power and privilege ensures the denial of equality across social collectives (Monture, 2007).

The *Indian Act* does discriminate and regulate the lives of First Nations people to a large extent. However, it is important to note that attempts have been made to abolish the *Indian Act*, though without consultation from First Nations, as was seen in the infamous White Paper of 1969 (formerly the "Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy"). Proposed by then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chrétien, the White Paper sought to abolish all legal documents pertaining

to Indians and assimilate them into the Canadian State (Canadian Encyclopedia, 2018). The document received pushback as it proposed to strip away all rights bestowed upon First Nations in regard to lands, treaties, sustenance, and government structure. Though many would ask what is wrong with this, I once heard author Lee Maracle speak at a conference for child welfare where she had this to say:

> "You can't keep someone in a cage for 150 years, control everything in their life, tell them who they are and how to govern, and then open the cage door to release them and expect them to be okay" (personal communication, 2009).

An extension of pressures to change without consultation is the demand for First Nations people to also provide proof of the difficulties and challenges they face. An example of this is society's demand for proof of the existence of racism and discrimination; this is a problem and needs to change. Furthermore, failure to prove discriminatory behaviour may lead to allegations of people being "Angry Indians." The core problem with discrimination and racism is how deeply entrenched beliefs can be within a mindset. So deep, in fact, that discriminatory or racist beliefs may not feel abnormal, in the wrong, or unacceptable. Depth of belief is important when thought processes around behaviour are questioned or when a different way of thinking arises. These examples and this discussion are provided to give insight to the inner workings of undue pressures placed upon marginalized peoples that are an extension to being treated less than.

Beliefs that are inherently racist or discriminatory can manifest through interactions; beliefs that are so deeply entrenched may not be obvious or overt. In my Masters research, I alluded to an experience of internalized oppression being committed

by those who are members of the same group as well. In my Masters research. This process, which I called Internalised Legislation, stems from eligibility criteria defined within the Indian Act which determines membership with a particular First Nations Band. This brings in the complexity of blood quantum and how much [blood] someone has. The experience of oppression from those who identify with only fosters frustration, fatigue, and hopelessness felt when you don't feel you belong, feel devalued, or are being discriminated against. This can be a painful experience to navigate. Breaking down barriers around racial battle fatigue are best suited to explain the impact that marginalization has had on First Nations. As an example, I draw from research in the US on Black Women perceived as 'The Angry Black Woman' or 'The Strong Black Woman' (Corbin et al., 2018). In the US, these culturally accessible images influence daily lives of Black Women, which are maintained through popular culture (Corbin et al., 2018). A similar narrative can be drawn in Canada, through the perceptions of people being either the "Angry Indian" or what I would call the "Strong and Traditional Indian." Both are equally discriminatory and influenced by society, pop culture, and a deep ceded racist belief system that has constructed categories for defining others. Without interpersonal interactions with diverse others to help create a new story or perception of a group of people, society is unable to replace false narratives and stereotypical perceptions they may have grown up believing about First Nations people (Corbin et al., 2018). Thus:

> …when the facts do not fit this racial frame, society changes the facts about Black Women to fit its stereotype. Pervasive and dominant, images of the Angry Black Woman and the STRONGBLACKWOMAN 'dehumanize and control Black women and deny them opportunities for true self-definition. These images create

> psychological and emotional tensions that trap and silence Black Women as they attempt to navigate their own selfhood under and in opposition to a White gaze. (Corbin et al., 2018, p. 629)

This social experience for Black Women is the closest parallel example to the experiences I hear from First Nations people and the experiences I have had firsthand. While we cannot ignore the diversity amongst First Nations people in Canada, it is important to note the connection between nations and people who share a similar lived experience. This is the root of difficulties surrounding depersonalizing witnessed discriminatory behaviours. It is painful to watch someone experiencing an attack based on their cultural identity, especially so if it is a cultural identity similar to the self. Continued scenarios that require you to defend yourself or prepare for the next occurrence has an impact on health over the long-term. When your emotions and psychological well-being are challenged, your holistic well-being as a person is challenged: you find yourself incapable of living to your fullest potential or, as Aristotle would say, your *daimon* (i.e., your true self).

Conceptual Lens/Theoretical Orientation

With the advent of the *Indian Act* in 1876 came certain controls over the lives of First Nations (Indians) including birth, death, land, language, culture, education, and identity as a few examples. The lives of First Nations people and federal fiduciary responsibility were laid out in a legal document within the lands newly recognized as Canada. Within the *Indian Act* are sections determining the lives of people defined as Indians by the Canadian Government. The focus of this research is the experience of identity for First Nations people; identity in the sense of cultural and personal identity,

social identities, and the externally-defined status identity. The research was a culmination of over a decade's-long personal journey toward understanding my own identity, the identity of the larger group of First Nations people I belong to, and the reality of intersectionality when navigating the unpredictable and ever-changing tides of identity. The conversation around identity conceptualisation is important to me as an Indigenous person through my mother and as a non-Indigenous person through my father. To acknowledge the full spectrum of my identity, I intentionally chose to learn from co-researchers and make sense of the significance around identity definitions through using a theory Aristotle called Eudaimonia.

Aristotle believed that one had to live to their true self in order to be happy and healthy. For Aristotle, this journey and ultimate destination was Eudaimonia. Eudaimonia is a concept from Aristotelian Philosophy. Discussed at length by Alan Waterman (2007), it is used in this research to explain and dissect the complexities around identity for First Nations. This is the Raven in me. Raven is our trickster being, he teaches by using tools and his skill of taking situations or events and flipping them on their head, usually he makes a mess of things. Avoiding the mess, my intent with Eudaimonia is to take an existing theory of identity and being who you were intended to be but address it in the context of First Nations identity. What barriers and challenges prevent the cycle of Eudaimonia from completing? What is within the circle of First Nations identity that would indicate a level of completion on the journey toward discovering who you were intended to be and doing what you were intended to do? Essentially using Eudaimonia as a tool to personalize the journey of identity for those who do not have the lived experience of politicized identity criteria.

Eudaimonia and Aristotle are in this research for a purpose bigger than the concept of identity. The difficulty in explaining First Nations people's identity to someone without the lived experience is a barrier in this work. Reflecting on how Raven, the trickster, would approach this challenge led me to use Aristotle to articulate the impacts of possessing a contested identity. For First Nations people, living to the true self has historically been challenged through repeated attacks on identity, language, culture, and true self. This challenge continues today.

Eudaimonia has a place in this dissertation because I know already that Indigenous Knowledge and culture provide me with all the teachings I need. Eudaimonia, as a tool, has challenged me as an Indigenous researcher to see how others might make sense of the complex experience identity poses for First Nations in Canada. I hope to reach a larger audience while challenging myself as an Indigenous academic to understand more than one way of seeing identity conundrums. People have thought about identity in terms of how we think about ourselves since time immemorial. Some questions that are asked include: where do we fit in social roles? How do we introduce ourselves, and how do we relate to others? The significance of identity and conflicts over developing or defining identity is often overlooked or brushed aside for First Nation Peoples as unimportant. I repeatedly witness people both with and without lived experience with a First Nation Peoples identity attempt to devalue my concerns over transmission and Indian Act definitions. This in the face of identity being something so inherent to an individual's existence and continually challenged and controlled by external power structures. This powerlessness to define and transmit an inherent trait or belief about yourself can affect health and wholeness.

Before proceeding, I should address my ambivalence towards *Status* as defined within the *Indian Act*. This comes from repeated exposure from those both within and outside my community challenging belonging based on the ability to carry a Status card. In the context of First Nations people's identity there are various situations that exist (or co-exist) that may either prevent or hinder the achievement of Eudaimonia:

1. First Nations people in Canada are the only people to have their daily lives and identity controlled and determined by the federal government.
2. First Nations people are often pegged as the "other" in society and fall into the categorical box of being dependent, not having it all together, and/or being less than other Canadians.
3. Oftentimes being First Nations means being able to present a piece of plastic (status card) to validate your identity to both outsiders and insiders; what should be an internal and organic process has become static, external, and inorganic (created).
4. Communities are facing dwindling numbers of "status" Indians due to the inability to transmit status with intermarriage or the declaration of a "status" father on a birth certificate. Inability to obtain status means (for some) not being considered a member of the Band, being ostracized by insiders, and a lack of certain rights (voting in Band elections, having a say in one's community, receiving funding, and being able to hunt/fish).

Furthermore, along with challenges which generate barriers toward achieving Eudaimonia, First Nations people continually experience health disparities, which are

both directly and indirectly, associated with social, cultural, economic, and political inequalities. These persistent inequalities result in a disproportionate burden of ill health and lack of access to health services (Adelson, 2005; Greenwood et al., 2017; 2018). Navigating identity and membership definitions prior to contact and now as dictated within the *Indian Act* is a challenge due to the unique lived experience First Nations people have with the Indian Act and Status eligibility criteria. Complications arise when attempting to explain a lived experience that is not necessarily shared by all or is completely unknown by others. This is where it is important to note that many Bands rely upon the *Indian Act* in determining both membership and funding in community, along with certain rights (e.g., sustenance activities, voting, health benefits). As discussed previously, identity was traditionally centered upon the people, land, culture, and language.

Prior to contact, First Nations knew themselves and others as *The People*. At the same time, the *Indian Act* and its determination of status eligibility maintains structures of oppression and a lack of autonomy in such a way that preserves inequalities in Canadian society. These inequalities filter down from the relationship as set out within the *Indian Act,* which deemed First Nations people (Indians) as wards of the state. This is relevant to the conversation on Eudaimonia due to realities of social and health experiences for First Nations who live under the *Indian Act* and may suffer lack of access to resources due to not being eligible for *status*.

Essentially there are two conversations happening at once in this work. First, the focus on identity and the impacts caused by restrictions on eligibility for status. Secondly,

the disparities that result from the inability to meet *status* eligibility and receive the same benefits as those in your community who do meet *status* eligibility.

Hadiksm Gaax di waayu: Locating Self

In doing research with an Indigenous focus, it is essential to introduce oneself in a way that presents an understanding of where a person comes from, who they are, and their relationships. My name is Jessie King and my traditional name is Hadiksm Gaax, the heading for this section translates to "Swimming Raven is my name." I grew up in Prince Rupert, but my matriline comes from Gitxaala, BC, a community of the Tsimshian Nation. Our family is of Dju wil'as, which translates to Chief of the Raven Tribe. All the women in my family are Raven Clan since we follow our mothers within our Nation. My father is not First Nations[3]. There are several complex pieces of my identity: I have two ethnic parts of my identity, my legal definition as 6(2) Status from the federal government and their *Indian Act*, and my social identities of wife, woman, daughter, granddaughter, niece, and mother.

The way I define my identity has changed over the years. This is a common experience shared by some of the co-researchers of this work. To elaborate on this, I begin with childhood when identity politics was not as salient as it is now. We live our identities as children, so entrenched in our culture that it is beyond our understanding that other ways of knowing and being exist. Only when I entered my teenage years did I begin to understand differences in more depth. This began as I was learning about my cultural identity from my family when I was participating in the North American Indigenous Games. I learned that these games were for people who came from a particular

[3] My father believes his ancestry to be a mix of English, Irish, and Scottish.

background; I witnessed more of my culture, learned about others, and soon realized that I was more than 'Canadian.' When I moved to Sweden for school, I was, for the first time, exposed to a completely different culture. I returned home committed to learning more about and strongly identifying with my mother's side of the family. In those early days, cultural identity was something I longed for and the role of status was something I questioned. This transformation was what I now realize is known as identity salience, when a particular identity comes to the front of mind (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999). Who I was and who I belonged to was not always at the forefront because it… just… was. It was who I was, and it existed without me paying any particular attention to it: always there, never challenged, not wavering, not talked about, and not really the cause of any discrimination or racism until my mid-teen years. It would be wrong to say that my cultural identity did not matter in my early years; rather I was not in a place to examine it.

How I have come to define my identity varies from the definitions external to my lived experience and from the legislation found within the *Indian Act*, though it remains impacted by those persisting commentaries. The *Indian Act* does not control my life but the very question of having *Status* and the inability to transmit *Status* is a constant reminder of the federal government's control over the group I identify with and the eventual extinction of what the *Indian Act* claims an Indian to be. As recently as June 11th, 2018, Perry Bellgarde stated that within 50 years we will no longer see "status Indians" due to the restrictions laid out within *Indian Act* criteria on eligibility (CBC, 2018). It should not matter who is or is not a Status Indian according to the federal

government, in fact, it does not matter until we bring up a few restrictions that come into play such as:

- Many First Nations communities still depend upon the *Indian Act* definitions of eligibility to help them to determine their membership
- Membership numbers can factor into federal funding models that support communities (e.g., 400 people living in community but only 300 have Status = federal government provides funding for 300 people).
- Membership bestows certain rights: fishing and hunting privileges, voting in community leadership, educational supports, health benefits, and some (few) tax-free items, if living on reserve.
- If membership is lenient in a community, funding is not. Bands risk going under financially when the number of individuals holding status dwindles. This comes out in the media as fraud when really, many communities are supporting members lacking status, which causes a strain on already meagre funding models.

Duncan McCue's (2016) take on the struggle of Indigenous youth in contemporary Canadian society while developing, understanding, and knowing their identity is comparable to my experience growing up. Living within a "confusing cultural duality" (p. 18) forces youth who are already working through identity development to face struggles to fit in while still exploring their cultural identity. A struggle only compounded through lack of access to cultural teachings or traditions of the Nation in which they are associated. The challenge of navigating identity can be complex and often requires self-examination without the added complication of *Indian Act* definitions. The *Indian Act* creates and maintains eligibility criteria that arranges First Nations people as status or

non-status. Unlike the very personal work of identity for most, the *Indian Act* creates a legal framework that creates divisions within First Nations communities and sometimes within families. The section of the *Indian Act* devoted to Status, *Definition and Registration of Indians*, categorizes individuals as 6(1) or 6(2), which denotes the ability (or inability) to transmit status to children depending on your choice in partner and their status (Appendix 2).

Conceptual Framework

> Conceptual frameworks make visible the way we see the world. Within research, these frameworks are either transparent (i.e., through form) or not, yet they are always present. The rationale for explicit representation of one's conceptual framework is that it provides insight into a researcher's beliefs about knowledge production, in general, and how those beliefs will impact the research project. (Kovach, 2010, p. 41)

In this work I use a story about Raven the trickster as a metaphorical representation of how the research was done and what values guided the inquiry in a safe and relevant manner. Stories are a valuable commodity among Indigenous communities. History, lessons, and relationships are transmitted through the telling of stories. Some stories are owned by families and only told at certain times of the year (Paul Michel, personal communication, 2011). Other stories are intended for specific audiences or are kept private/hidden away. The story that builds the framework for this research is ***How Raven Stole the Light,*** which is a creation story from my Tsimshian upbringing.

First Nations identity is not a discussion topic typically had out in the open. Until this work began, identity was a conversation I would have with those close to me or

behind closed doors to ensure I felt safe. Safety is an issue for First Nations people because identity is a convoluted mix of personal development, societal perceptions, and a means of subjugation by the government of Canada. It is often misunderstood and an easy target for racism or discrimination. However, behind closed doors, the many definitions or ways of determining First Nations people's identity is shared. This sharing is powerful while making space for shared laughter between those with similar experiences of identity. The story of Raven was essential to this research to ensure I followed my research values and walked/researched/reflected in a good way. This story is shared in the methods section.

Raven releasing the sun to bring light to the world was a metaphor that celebrated the findings of my previous research, which explored experiences of status loss for First Nations women. I visualized the stories shared by the women as the sun that Raven would ultimately release into the open for others to see/witness. When Raven released the sun, many beings began to see for the first time; just as the stories of status loss shared by the women, which drew attention to societal understandings of status loss/transmission issues. This sharing can be impactful for both those without the lived experience and those who had a similar experience but no venue to discuss what had happened to them. This is how I was able to make the purpose of the research important to both First Nations and non-First Nations people – stories are more than the tales they tell. The trickster, Raven, illustrates my beliefs surrounding knowledge creation and further to how I would like to do research, Raven reminds me, an Indigenous researcher, to work in a good way that is responsive to the people involved and to avoid research that does not provide an accurate picture of a situation with practical application.

With that said, I went into this research mindful of my dual identity as Tsimshian and non-Indigenous settler Canadian. I live and work within two worlds that come with their own philosophies, epistemologies, and axiologies. Prior to developing this research topic, my interest was piqued by a mentor making sense of my research through her understanding of Aristotle's philosophy of Eudaimonia. She made sense of my work by discussing the ability to live to your truest self as postulated by Aristotle. I will explore this point next and how it relates to the Indigenous piece of this research.

Utilizing dialogue as teaching and learning, the Greek philosophers remind me of the oral traditions used by First Nations people. To be clear, Aristotle's presence in this research is not intended to privilege one form of knowledge over another. Rather, it is a means to present knowledge and philosophy that is known and embraced by Western academic practice alongside Indigenous knowledge, which is equally valid, but often not cited as such. The concept of Eudaimonia helps me engage in a reflection on Indigenous philosophy while focusing on the process of identity exploration. This reflection makes space to work through conflicting and convoluted systems in place that hinder identity development and pride for First Nations people. Reflective practice reminds me to present all knowledges as equal and valid:

> If Aboriginal peoples want to claim that they possess different world views, and furthermore, if they want to assert that these differences ought to matter politically in the Aboriginal-Canadian state legal and political relationship, then they must engage the Canadian state's legal and political discourses in more effective ways. We need to find ways to shape the legal and political relationship

> so that it respects indigenous world views while generating a useful 'theory' of Aboriginal rights. (Turner, 2006, p. 99)

The challenge for Indigenous scholars is to present their knowledge in a way that speaks the language of the dominant culture (Turner, 2006). I respect what Turner says based on my experience in higher education and draw some hesitancy from the need to translate my way of knowing into another. I share the above quote to highlight the expectation placed on Indigenous researchers; to spotlight the pressure to fit within a model that everyone understands. I provide this disclaimer to draw upon my awareness of these structures in research and that the teachings within this dissertation are intended to begin a conversation, not to fit within a dominant perspective. Often, I am presented with knowledge that comes from the Western way of knowing, the traditional university curriculum that neglects to honour other ways of knowing. This struggle exists primarily because Indigenous scholars have, as noted by Turner (2006), been unsuccessful in their attempts to ignite change in Western philosophy and ways of knowing. Igniting true change is an issue I hope to address in this research along with the valuable knowledge surrounding First Nations people's identity and well-being.

During a conversation in the early stages of this work, it became apparent that what needed to happen was more than an investigation into a link between identity and well-being. The vision I have for this research is of my Elders and ancestors in a room with Aristotle having a discussion on identity, living in a good way, and being healthy. When I see this happening, neither side is higher or better in their position – the dialogue occurs on a level playing field with mutual acknowledgement and validation. The following is a reflection of this discussion from my journal:

> In this vision, both sides spoke and knew the same language, the language of learning and passing down knowledge on how to live in a good way to future generations. The knowledge on well-being and identity were interchangeable and were both aimed at understanding these constructs on a deeper, cultural, and spiritual level.

What is most profound is that the conversation I visualized between my ancestors and Aristotle is best described as *innate sense knowledge*; it was a combination of what was innately known and felt and what they knew/trusted to be true without preference for one epistemology or the other. The lack of hierarchy or one way of knowing above another resulted from approaching the topic from different perspectives while arriving at the same destination – truly uncovering identity and well-being. This enhances my desire to do research in this way; so that the recurring issue of Indigenous knowledge needing validation by Western academic traditions can be addressed. I am often asked why I look to Aristotle even after mentioning traditional First Nations knowledge – even worse, some responses have been negative and at one point I was asked how dare I turn my back on Indigenous Traditional Knowledge. My response was much like Dale Turner's (2006) in that a rich dialogue cannot happen unless knowledge is spoken in a language everyone understands. I truly believe a dialogue is doomed to fail when two parties do not speak the same language before being asked to acknowledge each other; more so when one is acknowledged over another. This is an equally important conversation to have alongside the research topic of identity. To do this, I will explain a way of doing research that speaks to more than one way of knowing to honour not only my identities but two ways of knowing and walking through the world. My approach to

daily interactions and research is best defined by Indigenous epistemologies and axiologies and an Indigenous mindset, but I also acknowledge Western ways of thinking and doing.

Part of this discussion on well-being and identity focusses on removing myself as the researcher from determining which knowledge is more valid, resulting in the overall purpose being lost. Collaborative dialogue inclusive of First Nations and Western ways of knowing will facilitate further discussions on identity and open spaces for safe dialogue. The collaborative design of this work and the inclusion of more than one way of knowing is essential to pushing back against the status quo. The current status quo continually forces those with the lived experience of an identity (that is often discriminated against) to speak on behalf of the larger group. In my experience, I have seen First Nations people requested to speak for or represent the larger group or risk not being included at all. I have witnessed and been the target of such requests repeatedly in my short academic career. This happens frequently in the academic and professional world as we stumble together in the spirit of achieving understanding and beginning discussions on reconciliation. Moving forward requires an understanding of what is happening beneath surface level awareness and privileging/acknowledging the voice of those with lived experience. The next section highlights literature relevant to the research and to this thesis.

Overview of the Thesis

The focus of this dissertation is deeply personal, and I chose this path as one of self-discovery and for revealing truths about being First Nations that have long been silent. Prior to August 2nd, 2013, this work was being done for hypothetical children to

describe their identities and the complexity of what will be a legal division within my family. The legal division arises from the second-generation cut-off found within the *Indian Act* that outlines the cessation of Status transmission in situations of 'marrying-out' twice (this will be elaborated on in the literature review).

As the child of a woman who parented with a non-status man and now as a mother parenting my own children with a non-status man, I am unable to transmit status to my children. My boys are soon to be 5 and 2 years old. They are non-status in a family of women on their maternal side who have status, but they are still Tsimshian and English, Irish, Scottish: a full mixture of cultures possessed by their family and those who came before them.

> This work was done for the next generation as I investigate the impacts of identity legislation for First Nations people in Canada, for my boys, and others in similar complex situations of defining identity.
>
> I did this work for them.
>
> I did this work for myself.
>
> I did this work to prepare for the conversations I will have with my children one day when they ask about Status.

The following chapters include guiding literature that supported this research and an in-depth discussion on my choice for methodology, and how the research proceeded over the course of data collection, analysis, and completion.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Literature reviewed for this research on identity and well-being considers both Western and Indigenous thought. Bridging identity theory to lived experience was essential to engaging in commentary on the First Nations experience of identity and competing sources of information that feed into how an individual defines who they are. This research aimed to explore the gap in understanding the lived experience of identity for individuals possessing Status through the Indian Act. A second gap exists in understanding the varying levels of impact on well-being when individuals are exposed to competing definitions influencing or informing how they think about their identity. There is a lack of identity research for groups who possess an identity that may be contested, controlled, marginalized, or misunderstood. Further to this gap in the research is missing discourse on nation-specific definitions of what it means to be First Nations in Canada; specifically: What does it mean to be from a specific Nation (Tsimshian, Nisgaa, Mohawk, etc.)?

- What are the traditional/cultural definitions of these specific identities?
- How would identity develop without interference from the *Indian Act*?
- What supports First Nations identity(ies)?
- How do you know who you are and is this important?

Extending beyond the lacunae on this topic informed directions for the research questions the co-researchers have responded to in this work. These existing gaps in the research on identity are addressed at the end of the literature review in more depth.

Personhood and Identity

John Locke stated that personhood is determined when one is "a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself, as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places" (Locke, 1694 as cited in DeGrazia, 2005, p. 3). Therefore, a person is a being that actively thinks about their personhood, their existence, and shows awareness of their personhood. DeGrazia (2005) goes on to discuss bodily and social awareness as major contributors to journeying through life knowing oneself. Social awareness is an understanding of where one fits within the social structures around them – what is your group position and what are the expectations of that role? Stein (1998) claims that we spend the first half of our lives building this awareness by developing our ego and persona, by becoming successful individuals, and undergoing cultural adaptation to our physical and social environments. A person develops in several ways throughout their lifespan and can undergo multiple changes at multiple levels of self (Stein et al., 1998). A large part of this development is our interactions with others coalescing with our perceived roles and place in society. For marginalized groups, this experience may look quite different from someone who has little to no experience with racism, discrimination, or legal components outlining eligibility criteria.

Identity definitions are also built upon our understandings of the projections of others, these first exposures to knowing who we are come from parents, caregivers, family, and close-knit community. We are exposed to these projections as beliefs and teachings that shape our consciousness while supporting social cohesion. The projections by others in our lives are internalized and influence our opinions, views, and values that

inform how we move through the world (Stein et al., 1998). This internalization of epistemology and axiology illustrates the influence of culture and the impacts on personal development.

Personhood suggests that to possess the ability to think about ourselves and identify a group that we belong to that we require exposure to learning on belonging and expectations in society. Societies have developed social structures, over time,that bind us to like persons; we categorize and make meaning of who we belong to and where we fit within our in-group, a group that we most identify with and/or consider we belong to. The variation we see between people is largely due to the family, social stratum, culture, and era into which we are born (Stein et al., 1998).

Identity is at the core of belonging and knowing social positions. First Nations people were, and continue to be, highly organized social groups wherein identity plays a key role, though not always explicitly discussed. Personal identity is with us without extensive effort, it exists and develops as we think about who we are, and can change/be altered in a fluid manner. Personal identity, therefore, is a presupposed condition of basic practices in our daily lives and builds our psychological continuity – that we are a being continuing forward. Developing a personal identity facilitates the ability to build memory and create future-plans; it is a cognitive resource for understanding what we have done in the past, what we are doing now, and what we plan to do in the future (DeGrazia, 2005). The process of learning the self, knowing the self, and planning for our future self is a life-long journey of discovery.

Identity can be referred to as an umbrella term that describes how an individual understands their being and how they perceive their being as both an object and ‘an actor

in the social world.' Houkamau and Sibley describe identity as a multidimensional feature of a person and the self-images that go along with self-experience (Houkamau & Sibley, 2010). According to Erikson, the concept of personal identity is comprised of a set of goals and beliefs that one shows to the world (Erikson, 1980; Schwartz, 2001). However, this brings up other forms of identity, such as the social and group identity of an individual. Social identity is an individual's solidarity with the ideals of a group to which they belong. And group identity includes language, country of origin, racial background (Schwartz, 2001), and (for the purpose of this research) Nation to name a few examples.

Unfortunately, intercultural contact in between First Nations people and non-First Nations people created a series of assimilative efforts directly targeting identity, belonging, and how First Nations are perceived in Canadian society. Berry (1999) states that the First Nations people's experience has been that of acculturation that has ultimately caused cultural disruption. Cultural disruption in Canada has led to a reduction in health and not only identity loss but confusion for those seeking out who they are and where they belong (Berry, 1999). The lack of a clear definition of one's identity has been linked to disorientation when it comes to what to do in the present, heightened anxiety, and a lack of hope for a better future (Waterman, 2007). Burbank states that when policy focuses upon particular identities, a gap is created within society and, unfortunately, negative discourse may arise. For example, when focus is placed upon a minority identity the outcome is often only the successful exacerbation or exaggeration of any negative characteristics that may be associated with the minority identity (Burbank, 2011). This is the state of identity relations in Canada; it is a divisive state that has 'othered' First

Nations people in the country they call home. I propose in the next section that the current literature on identity has contributed, alongside colonial legislation, to the control of First Nations lives.

Western Conceptions of Identity: The Psychology of It

It is important to examine existing measures that quantify identity, such as the Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS) and the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Scale (MEIM). The MEIM is one of the most widely accepted measures that has contributed to much of ethnic identity research since 1992 (Yoon, 2011). The EIS is one of two measures that were developed to address some shortcomings noted in the MEIM; however, both measures use a) Tajfel's social identity theory and b) Erikson and Marcia's identity theories from 1968 and 1980 respectively.

It is important to note that the MEIM measure is designed to explore three aspects of identity: affirmation, achievement, and behaviours. Affirmation derives from a need to be validated and accepted by others while achievement is the intended end result that satisfies the need to know who we are. Behaviours are the resulting decisions and pathways we select each day that are rooted deeply in our social positions and who we think we are (Yoon, 2011).

The EIS accounts for three distinct subscales of exploration, resolution, and affirmation along the lines of Erikson's theory of identity to understand the structure of identity. Individuals can rate within one of eight types in the EIS: 1) diffused positive, 2) diffused negative, 3) foreclosed positive, 4) foreclosed negative, 5) moratorium positive, 6) moratorium negative, 7) achieved positive, or 8) achieved negative. This allows

individuals the possibility of being rated as high in exploration or resolution but carry negative attitudes toward their group, as an example (Yoon, 2011).

Noting these scales leads to a discussion of their relevance for this research and topic. How relevant are they to the person whose identity is being measured? Does it benefit anyone to be categorized according to identity formation or achievement? How meaningful are these scales for a group of people defined and identified externally through government legislation? The evidence within identity scales and categories reveals a lack of inclusion of individuals living within a colonial state that defines a legal identity factoring into membership with community. Moving beyond the identified gap in identity theory, a conversation around how identity and identity politics can impact health is necessary.

Perhaps a new/old angle on the topic of identity linking to well-being may be to revisit an older theory of basic needs developed by Abraham Maslow. It may be that categorizing identities and the relevance of identity measures is not the approach to take, it has been done before with questionable results, as seen above. In the context of achieving psychological health and overall well-being, the basic needs of a human should be considered. Basic needs are the need for food, shelter, and safety, among others. Maslow went a step further by documenting higher order human desires, such as the need for safety, belongingness, self-esteem, self-actualization, and autonomy (Maslow, 1970). These findings on belonging, safety, and self-actualization were formed in part by Maslow's time among the Blackfoot in Alberta and comparing his findings to his upbringing in a predominantly non-Aboriginal society. He noticed how individuals who had managed to create a society were more likely to achieve these needs very

successfully. As a result of his field work, he noted many of the points I will touch upon in this research – the need for self-esteem, self-actualization, and autonomy. He found that people generally need (or desire) a stable and high evaluation of oneself in order to achieve feelings of mastery, competence, independence, freedom, importance, dignity, and status. In achieving these goals of self-esteem, an individual can enjoy the feeling of self-confidence, capability, and being useful to society (Maslow, 1970).

Related to the topic of Eudaimonia, is the higher order need of self-actualization that Maslow describes as being the achievement that allows people "to become actualized in what they are potentially" (Maslow, 1970, p. 22). In short, Maslow stated that self-actualization was the act of becoming everything that an individual is capable of becoming, something that has been hindered for First Nations people in Canada by the *Indian Act* (recognizing that several assimilative practices beyond the *Indian Act* have been perpetuated by the federal government in our shared history).

Finally, Maslow (1970) talks about functional autonomy as a result of an individual having achieved all the basic and higher needs of his hierarchy. The functionally autonomous person is one who is satisfied, independent, and able to cope with difficulty and loss; this person is often seen to be a healthy member of society (Maslow, 1970). Autonomy is something that has been taken away from and actively prevented for First Nations people through governmental control by way of the *Indian Act* and various assimilative policies intended to divide people and unravel community dynamics.

Indigenous Identities

Adding an Indigenous perspective on identity and well-being is imperative to this literature review and research. An interesting article on Indigenous identity comes from a Māori perspective by Houkamau and Sibley (2010). They emphasize that there are many different ways of 'being' Māori. As a First Nations person in Canada, this resonates with me. The diversity of First Nations across Canada is incredible – 615 communities representing over 50 Nations (AANDC, 2010). Like the Māori, there are many different ways of being First Nations that operate with. This is a factor to consider when conceptualizing identity as an entity that can be measured by a scale on an individual basis, as noted above in the Western Conceptions of Identity section.

Houkamau and Sibley (2010) have developed an inherently Māori measure of identity. Terminology used in the measure emerged from interviews with Māori people and the resulting questions are designed to gauge a sense of Māori identity in a relevant and respectful manner. The difference between quantitative and qualitative measures of identity is best explained through an example of Houkamau and Sibley's measure:

> "I reckon being Māori is awesome," "My relationships with other Māori People (friends and family) are what make me Māori,"
>
> "I believe that my Taha Wairua (my spiritual side) is an important part of my Māori identity," and "You can tell true Māori just by looking at them."
>
> (Houkamau & Sibley, 2010, p. 16)

This line of questioning is arranged into categories covering a) authenticity beliefs, b) socio-political consciousness, c) cultural efficacy and active identity

engagement, d) spirituality, e) interdependent self-concept, and f) group membership evaluation. These are components missing in Western conceptions of identity measurement theories. They can also be supported through ancient texts of Aristotle and his concept of Eudaimonia, to be discussed later.

Shifting the gaze toward the experience of First Nations people who are recognized as having "status" is imperative for the conversation on identity.

> To hear some tell the tale, a status card is a magical relic bestowing upon the bearer: tax exemptions, free gas, new trucks, houses, and pretty much anything else under the sun dreamed up during a particular flight of fancy. Many people believe anyone identifying or identified as Aboriginal automatically receives a status card. (Vowel, 2016, p. 25).

Status is a critical component of identity for many First Nations people, though not all, as it still has a role to play day to day life. Crucial to understanding status for First Nations people is the origin of status. Status is not a First Nations concept, it did not exist prior to contact and, in fact, did not exist until eligibility criteria was developed within the *Indian Act.*

First Nations people do not have control over status but they do have control (somewhat) over membership of their communities (Vowel, 2016). Essentially the breakdown of status is best understood through the definitions of status criteria. Someone who is status can be categorized as either 6(1) or 6(2), these groups alone are confusing but essentially denote an individual's ability to transmit their status to future generations. This differentiation is important to highlight in this research due to the common believe that 6(1) and 6(2) are sometimes conflated with blood quantum conversations (ie.

categories do not equate to a "level" of status). Essentially, one cannot be "half-status" or "full-status" but you are categorized based on your ability to transmit status (Vowel, 2016). As an example, my mother is 6(1), which means she is able to transmit status to children regardless of who father's her children. I, on the other hand, fall within the 6(2) categorization, which means I can only transmit status to children who are fathered by someone categorized as 6(1) or 6(2). This confusion is best understood by the following diagram, which can be found in several articles, texts, and conversations on status (my scenario is bolded for reference):

6(1)	+	6(2)	=	6(1)
6(1)	+	6(1)	=	6(1)
6(2)	+	6(2)	=	6(1)
6(1)	**+**	**Non-status**	**=**	**6(2)**
6(2)	**+**	**Non-status**	**=**	**Non-status**

**Adapted from Vowel (2016).*

In addition to these categories there are two recent amendments that have altered eligibility criteria slightly to account for status loss related to gender discrimination, Bill C-3 and Bill S-3. Bill C-3, the Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act, was enacted in January 2011 to address the loss of status for grandchildren of women who lost status through marriage prior to 1985. Bill S-3, An Act to Amend the Indian Act in response to the Superior Court decision in Descheneaux c. Canada, came into effect in December 2017 in attempt to mitigate remaining gender discrimination in the Indian Act (Government of Canada, 2019). Status does not equate to cultural identity, but it still carries an impact, one of which is on health.

> The cultural identity of Indigenous Peoples is one of the primary aspects that colonization continues to attack. Ill health, including what the West calls mental ill health, is a symptom of this attack of cultural identity. (Lavallee & Poole, 2010, p. 275)

Understanding identity and its impacts on health begins with accepting that colonization has directly attacked and disrupted the identity of First Nations people in Canada. Then we must accept that this attack, both personally and legally (via the *Indian Act*), continues and is maintained through eligibility criteria determining status, membership, and the ability to transmit status. When identity is attacked, the spirit has been wounded and needs to be healed in order to avoid or recover from symptoms playing out through ill health Once this attack on cultural identity is validated and acknowledged to have caused significant ill health for First Nations people, then healing begins with repairing the spiritual wounds by rebuilding the individual and collective identity that was targeted in the first place. (Lavallee and Poole, 2010). Essentially, the historical and current treatment of First Nations people maintains a cycle of ill health by disrupting cultural identities.

Despite the continued attack and control over identity for First Nations via the Indian Act, cultural identities remain through embodied knowledge and connection to the land. This unshakeable knowledge is often referred to as Blood Memory, in reference to the enduring nature of Indigenous knowledge and connection (Lawrence, 2004). Blood Memory is the direct link to our ancestors that allows us to claim the experiences of our ancestors as our own. It can be painful to claim the trauma that has happened through Blood Memory, but it is also a source of power with the ability to rebuild our cultures and

withstand assimilative efforts. I include Blood Memory in this work to honour the link between land, language, culture, and identity. Blood Memory is undeniable: "our bodies do have a knowledge all their own, and the site of memory, of handed-down memory, and of ancient ties to place, cannot simply be dismissed as 'socially constructed'" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 201). Through Blood Memory we maintain a bond that cannot be taken away, a bond that is a source of strength. Extending beyond our Blood Memory is the importance of place and geography when we consider cultures are deeply impacted by the environments around them.

Additionally, a major finding regarding place and geography contributes to work previously done by Adriana Umana-Taylor and Nana Shin (2007) who first suggested that ethnic identities may have varying salience. That an ethnic identity may mean something different in a different geographical space or that it may vary in salience is a groundbreaking consideration. Salience and meaning have a place in discussions on First Nations identity, especially so when we remember how closely linked our identities are to the land through culture, language, storytelling, and our ancestors.

Building Blocks of Psychological Health

Literature covering information on self-esteem, life-satisfaction, and perception of health are relevant to the topic of identity and its connection to well-being. Consider the psychological issues people seek out assessment and treatment for: relationship problems, personal difficulties (self-esteem problems, identity-related issues, lack of general satisfaction), achievement problems (stagnation and dissatisfaction, job or life transitions, etc.), physical problems, and normal but distressing processes (grief and/or loss). As noted by Linden and Hewitt (2012), these issues can cause significant distress for

individuals and disruption for not only the person, but their relationships. This proves to be the case when considering the health of a Nation as well when we consider the tight-knit groupings many First Nations people live within. When an individual is distressed (e.g., over their legally defined identity influencing their personal identity), it is possible for that distress to spread amongst family members and to the larger community. Some research has suggested that members of disadvantaged or marginalized groups face the threat of witnessing negative treatment of group members with whom they identify. Given that this witnessing of group marginalization happens as well, we can see how the pressure over developing identities within marginalized populations is far more complex than not meeting eligibility criteria alone.

Another way to look at identity and well-being is through considering psychological distress over time. A focus on causes of identity distress and possible cascading effects spilling over into physical well-being might be a direction for research beyond this work. For example, stressors are life events that may harm an individual to the extent of having an effect on physical or mental health; such is the case in situations where individuals feel de-valued by society, thus causing issues with self-esteem. That said, group identification fulfills an individual's need for belonging, meaning, and positive well-being (Molix & Bettencourt, 2010). I also saw this pattern emerge in the narratives of the First Nations women who contributed to my master's thesis (King, 2011). First Nations people value group membership and find happiness being around others who share their identity. Being in a community of others like you can also validate how you perceive the world and can sometimes fulfill cultural and traditional needs (ceremony, reconnecting with relations, food gathering, etc.).

Recent findings have indicated that members of marginalized groups are both psychologically and physically protected to some extent by means of membership in their identified group. Individuals are protected physically in the sense of being a barrier to physical manifestations of stress exposure. Stress exposure in the context of identity can take the shape of covert micro-efforts that can slowly chip away at individuals who are targeted through discrimination. These micro-problems were first termed racial microaggressions by Chester Pierce in 1970 upon his examination of subtle and sometimes non-verbal cues that were directed at ethnic minorities in the US. According to Pierce, racial microaggressions are repeated attacks that may occur with or without the offender or recipient realizing anything has happened. This covert behaviour is a product of the public health illness of racism (Pierce, 1974). Racial microaggression research can support a discussion on the impacts on well-being.

Critical Analysis of Existing Western Identity Research

> "In no way does Western thinking address any system of cognition except its own" (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 17).

Identity theories are well intentioned by seeking to facilitate the measurement of a psychosocial and cultural construct to potentially aid in understanding the structure of identity. However, these measures suffer from being too person-focused while ignoring the larger socio-cultural environment involved in ethnic identities. First Nations people should be distinct from the ethnic minority umbrella term often used in validating identity measures. For that reason, I chose not to include identity measures and to instead come at identity with an Indigenous and lived experience lens.

First Nations people have a unique challenge when it comes to the ability to say, "I am (Tsimshian, Haida, Carrier, etc.)." The ability to define an identity for First Nations people in Canada is monitored and bestowed upon individuals in a way that no other group experiences. Status identity, and any benefits related to it, is administered by both the Government of Canadian and First Nation Governments through Band Lists. To be First Nations in the 21st Century, is to have the internal and external piece together: the cognitive, affective, and motivational components together with the behavioural expressions of being First Nations in a [social] community (Berry, 1999). However, first we have to begin with the understanding that Indigenous worldviews are different from Western worldviews (Duran & Duran, 1995).

For Indigenous Peoples, being in the world is the totality of one's personality; it is not something to compartmentalize and separate into distinct parts (mind, body, spirit separations). Because of these differences, Duran and Duran note that it is no wonder Indigenous Peoples are content with being 'alienated' from 'Western therapies' and choose to not address their psychological problems using these therapies (1995) because the way in which problems, and their solutions, are defined do not originate in their traditional histories. My intention is not to paint all psychology or 'Western' knowledge in a terrible light. Sitting Bull once said: "Take what is good from the White Man and let's make a better life for our children" (as cited in Duran & Duran, 1995, 19), which sounds like good advice.

Social Identity Theory traces identity as developing from a person's sense of belonging to a particular group and a sense of membership (Tajfel, 1981). "Through identities individuals negotiate their place in the social space and become accepted (or

rejected) as authentic representatives of certain identities" (Ehala, 2018, p. 125). Social identity and group identity are facilitated by the motivation of individuals to contribute to their perceived ingroup. Contributing to an ingroup fosters a sense of belonging needed to formulate an individual's self-esteem.

Identifying and naming in-groups and out-groups, help us to locate features of social units (individuals or groups) and how value systems are communicated amongst members or between groups. Meaning-making around identity and social units is a negotiation that ultimately determines how an individual will identify. At the root of this personal work on identity is the basic psychological need to categorize 'us' and 'them' (Ehala, 2018). The ability to reflect on individual identity comes from a curiosity that (for First Nations people) can be hindered by external forces. These external forces create a barrier for a process known as achieving Eudaimonia, as originally termed by Aristotle and understood simply as living to your truest self.

Aristotle's Eudaimonia

This philosophy states that a person must live a life that is consistent with their 'daimon' (true self) in order to achieve virtue, excellence, and their best self. Important to note here is that the theory itself is designed with the individual in mind, which could read as counter-intuitive when talking about a group of people best described as a collective. However, I chose to keep Eudaimonia in this research for the reason that though First Nations are collectively driven populations, there are individuals within that collective. These individuals, though part of a larger collective, do partake in personal reflection and thought about who they are and what that means. This may be a result of

living most of my adult life away from my community and seeking out meaning through reflection on my own personhood.

Waterman (2007) suggests that a person's sense of identity is an approximation of their daimon; it is a set of goals, values, and beliefs that correspond to the actual potentialities of a person. Furthermore, those who rate high on Eudaimonia should also be high in regard to autonomy. These individuals experience self-determination and the ability for independence (Waterman, 2007) and, from my perspective, eventually facilitate interdependence as part of a whole. Thus, the ability to make decisions on their own to live their best life is gained and the cycle of being silenced is overcome. Eudaimonistic philosophies originate from definitions of achieving happiness, place, meaning, and a sense of being where one wants to be.

Eudaimonia acts as the mechanism connecting identity to the well-being of individuals. The bridge connecting identity to health develops insight for identity structures required to live in a good way. Essentially, to achieve Eudaimonia, people must live in accordance with the previously mentioned daimon. Living in accordance with your daimon is the pathway to having meaning and direction in life. Some confuse this with achieving happiness, but, as Waterman (2007) suggests, it was clear that Aristotle did not intend this definition. Rather, to achieve Eudaimonia is to arrive in a place where an individual has what they desire and that which is worth having in life (1976). Norton (1976) describes Eudaimonia simply as being where one wants to be in life, doing what they want to do; in essence, what an individual has or what they have achieved is worth having.

Bridging Identity and Well-Being

> The relationships between racial stressors and health outcomes are consistent and robust but the mechanisms by which these effects occur are still poorly understood. For many, race-related stressors may be a particularly pernicious background stressor that is highly salient, uncontrollable, and instrumental in the appraisal of new stressors. (Richman & Jonassaint, 2008, p. 105)

There are two distinct discussions of identity and how it relates to well-being for First Nations people: a) identity in the context of being a member of a marginalized or visible minority group and b) in a situation of external locus of legislative control over identity for First Nations people. Components of psychological wellbeing include the overarching focus on the theory of individual self-determination, which highlights an individual's need to satisfy basic psychological needs as one pursues their valued outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Psychological needs are: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. To achieve these needs, an individual must secure 'nutriments' that are essential "for psychological growth, integrity, and well-being" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 229). This is similar to the work by Maslow and his hierarchy of higher order needs (self-esteem, self-actualization, and functional autonomy) once basic needs (safety, food, housing) have been met (Maslow, 1970).

The external nature of the Indian Act imposed upon First Nations people may in fact be a stressor for First Nations people. Stressor research plays an important role in investigating the effects stress has on an individual both mentally and physically. Much of psychological health is determined by the stressors that are threatening to an individual. Looking at indicators of psychological health, such as self-esteem and

mastery, can provide the insight required to identify how stressors affect well-being. Self-esteem and mastery are significant to a discussion on identity due to their role in the capacity of coping sources that are capable of buffering against negative impacts of stress on psychological health (Marcussen et al, 2004). An example of how this approach can identify indicators is by focusing in on self-esteem. Self-esteem happens through the process of comparing oneself to others, looking at their successes and failures. Marcussen et al. (2004) found that when witnessing perceived unfair treatment in a university environment, those who perceived said unfair treatment experienced increased rates of depression. In this research, students were experiencing a stressor to their student identity. Other research has shown a similar response among a racial group of people with a shared experience of marginalization. Race-related stress is a situation wherein a person is repeatedly in situations where their race comes under attack. This goes for research on the topic of racial battle fatigue as well. Both race-related stress and racial battle fatigue take into account the toll taken on an individual facing continuous racialized attacks. “In terms of the relationship between race-related stress and emotional states, experiences with Cultural Racism (racism based in condemnation and belittling of one’s racial group) were related to more depression, anger, confusion, fatigue, and tension” (Carter & Reynolds, 2011, p. 160).

While current research is limited to ethnic minorities, not inclusive of First Nations people, for the purpose of this research, current race-related stress research lends itself to the experience of historical assimilation and marginalization that exist in Canada. Ample research has shown impacts from racism and discrimination on mood and emotional states, racial identity, and adjustment of African American individuals (Carter

& Reynolds, 2011). These arguments are supported by previous research presented on racial microaggressions and the impact of continued exposure on load. The stress of repeated exposure appears in the literature on the translation of external stressors into physiological impacts. The biological mechanism of stress via research on allostatic load (physiological wear and tear) shows how the human body can naturally adapt to external stimuli but that repeated exposure can present physiologically through diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, decreased physical capacity, obesity, or severe cognitive decline in extreme circumstances (Johnson et al., 2017).

An example of physiological and cognitive impacts over time can be seen in the symptoms of depression. Depression may make people less likely to engage in healthy lifestyle behaviours or cause someone to not enjoy activities they once did. More solid evidence notes that depression can have direct physiological affects through heightened glycemic levels in the case of diabetes (Reading, 2009). One should wonder how repeated exposure to stressors or perceived inequitable treatment would affect an individual from a minority of the population and sharing in that experience as a group forced to the margins of a larger society.

Identifying with a particular racial identity has been shown to act as a buffer against negative experiences stemming from racism and discrimination. In fact, racial identity also buffers against adverse effects that come with being the target of racism. This is thought to be due in part to the social support that an individual gains from their identified group, despite having their ethnic identity attacked (Richman & Jonassaint, 2004).

Lacunae

> "Lying complacent in a narrow conception of the past and nearly paralyzed by fear in a constrained vision of the future, both the colonized and the colonizers have been forced to accept and live with a state of unfreedom" (Alfred, 2005, p. 121).

Perspectives of how First Nations people's identities relate to a nation's well-being are largely missing in the literature. In the same tone as the quote above, having a narrow conception of the past and a fear of the future may inhibit people from seeing the connection between identity and health. This missing connection continues to be unaddressed while Canada remains the only country to maintain a legal framework that defines a People.

A gap exists in identity literature around the dialogue between the collective and the individual in the formation of identity. This gap is highlighted in this research using an individualistic theory, Eudaimonia, to explain individual experiences of identity development within a collective. Because of assimilative efforts in Canada that occurred through colonization, a major result was the creation of division. Whether this division happened between nations, within communities, or within families, there was an ultimate agenda to divide and conquer. We see this today through lateral violence within some communities. The major limitation of identity research is specific to Indigenous populations, specifically those in Canada. The research on identity focuses attention on the individual and on psychological interpretations of identity while privileging definitions of identity provided by the co-researchers. Theories date back to the 1960s and 1980s regarding identity frameworks and measures to place individuals within

categories of identity achievement. The piece that is missing, and has not been explored, is the extent to which external players influence identity development and achievement. The Canadian government retains the right to determine who is an 'Indian' and, furthermore, to restrict the transmission of that identity (Gervais, 2007). To add insult to injury, those 'eligible' to be an 'Indian' carry an identification card to prove their identity, when it is required. While I do not intend to conflate First Nations identity entirely with status, it would be negligent of me to ignore the influence it has for some in terms of membership and rights. Furthermore, eligibility criteria and the need to validate an identity goes against the concept of Blood Memory. Blood Memory is passed through generations from the ancestors and is often thought of as being spiritual knowledge that comes through visions, dreams, and intuition (Lavallee et al., 2009). This knowledge may be difficult to digest in the university because it cannot be quantitatively assessed or measured. As Indigenous researchers it is our challenge to uncover this knowledge and validate its existence. The identified lacunae in the research supported my choice in how to interview the co-researchers in this work. Data collection methods and analysis are covered in the following section on methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In choosing a methodology for Indigenous research, much will depend on the research question, the purpose of the research, the consideration of the Indigenous research context, and the desire and capacity of the research team. From my

> perspective, choice of methodology is equally a political act. Historically, much Indigenous research, as I am defining, did not consider Indigenous voice and involvement. (Kovach, 2017, p. 215)

Undertaking research requires careful consideration of methodologies. This is necessary for all research, especially that which engages with people contributing to findings. Discussions on research methodologies should begin with the understanding that methodology is comprised of two parts: a knowledge/belief system and the actual methods. While qualitative research does make space for Indigenous methods, any discussion alongside "Western-constructed research processes" is a stark reminder of the tumultuous history of poorly done qualitative research (Kovach, 2010, p. 24).

As an Indigenous researcher who often walks in two worlds, the curious academic and the seeker rediscovering my Indigenous traditional knowledge, deciding on a methodology was challenging. Initial iterations of this research included components of Grounded Theory (GT) methodology because my desire, as a researcher, was to develop a theory behind the experience of First Nations identity. After much consideration, GT did not fit for me as an Indigenous Researcher but it remains briefly mentioned to highlight the challenge in finding a methodology that fits well. I disclose this to share my struggle as an Indigenous academic attempting to balance several worlds of thought and inquiry within the university. Indigenous academics often feel the pressure of the academy imposing views upon their traditional teachings and cultural protocols. For me, the pressure was partially self-inflicted due to my preconceived notions of how I thought my work would be received. These beliefs stem from witnessing other Indigenous

researchers being confronted on the validity and rigour of their research. With guidance from my committee, the decision to formally acknowledge this work as Indigenous Methodology (IM) was made and I employed methods based on a mixture of teachings and values I grew up with and relevant IM sources. In the results and discussion chapters of this research, you will experience an explicit agenda privileging Indigenous Voice in this work. This dissertation was written with the goal of embedding respect for both co-researcher contributions (through story) and Indigenous epistemologies.

This research finds grounding in Indigenous epistemologies (ways of knowing), axiologies (values), ontology (being), and methodologies. Using IM illustrates and celebrates how I see the world as an Indigenous researcher. Vine Deloria Jr. first identified the historical lack of attention to "Indian Methodologies" in the academic world. Even now, almost 20 years later, the movement/shift to IM is a struggle with some pressures to join them [IMs] to existing bodies of knowledge in use (Deloria, 1999). As an Indigenous Researcher, I am most comfortable when I am able to use the tools I learned in studying qualitative research and apply them within an Indigenous framework. I intentionally borrow from several schools of thought and categorize them within cultural values of the research to be defined later in this chapter. The combination of tools/methods discussed and utilized in this work has resulted in a research design that fits within my worldview. Taken together, this process of borrowing from other schools of thought while privileging Indigenous voice emphasizes what Shawn Wilson (2008) called relationality. Thinking in terms of relationality, we come to know everything in the world as connected and in relationship. This includes knowledge, living beings, the land, and other objects; everything is related and is part of the whole. This is why methodology

has been and continues to be a challenge for me as an Indigenous researcher: I understand the comfort others find in the layout of Western qualitative methods, but my Indigenous way of thinking and relating resonate more with my innate desire to respect and acknowledge Indigenous knowledges and systems.

In this chapter you will read about guiding axiologies and epistemologies inspired from my lived experience as an Indigenous academic and current writings in IM. IMs fit within my worldview, my value system, and, ultimately, my approach to the research questions in this dissertation. Further into this section I will present cultural values that articulate how I approached the topic of First Nations identity and how I engaged with co-researchers, from introducing the research to the final stages of member-checking. Following and honouring my cultural roots, my research axiology is depicted using abalone (Bilha'a) shells from my button blanket as a metaphor. These values are embedded in this work just as they are embedded on my blanket with Raven[4].

Indigenous Methodology

Unfortunately, Indigenous researchers have often had to explain how their perspective is different from that of dominant system scholars; they have seemingly needed no such justification in order to conduct their research. Yet, Indigenous scholars have met this task. The idea that knowledge is approached through the intellect leads to the belief that research must be objective rather than subjective. (Wilson, 2004, p. 55). It is important to note that all qualitative research is subjective, Wilson's point on objectivity solidifies this feature of qualitative research perfectly.

[4] A Button Blanket was gifted to me in 2008 upon completion of my Bachelor of Science in Psychology. This blanket is adorned with a Raven in the middle and a water design on the outer edges. Along the design are two sizes of Bilha'a (abalone buttons).

Throughout this research it was imperative to remain mindful of the history between Western and Indigenous knowledges and peoples. Research is a dirty word to several Indigenous communities due to poorly done research and disrespectful researchers (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; 2012). Research is a word that elicits varied responses, drums up an array of questions, and is interpreted differently amongst a group. As Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) says, research conjures up many thoughts and emotions for Indigenous people. The most dramatic are those that remind Indigenous people of the distrust research has caused along with the dehumanizing nature of its inquiry. Recently, there has been a shift in focus to the unique situation of Indigenous Peoples in the university environment, heavily dominated by Western ideals. Kovach (2010) informs us that this is not to reduce the importance of other ethnic minorities but to highlight the different group experiences.

Understanding the experience of others was the intent of this research. Identity conversations are essential to understanding both the historical and current lived experience for First Nations people in Canada. However, loss of trust from poorly conducted research (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999) has bred an additional complexity when research involves Indigenous Peoples. Kovach (2010) talks about mitigating the barriers to doing research by exploring the relationship between Peoples. In particular, Kovach suggests that two things need to happen: Indigenous Peoples need to suspend distrust and non-Indigenous peoples need to suspend disbelief in other ways of knowing. Indigenous Peoples and the academy have the task of creating a new dialogue to pursue the development of cross-cultural research. Part of the intent behind this research is to provide more attention to traditional ways of knowing and, as an Indigenous academic, to

use the tools I have been given to challenge the status quo. Approaching knowledge in this way will build a common understanding of what knowledge is culture specific and whether there is any universality that can be applied to knowledge. There is room to improve the Western system by helping it to understand the 'breadth and scope of human behaviour (Matsumoto, 1994).

The overarching goal of research done in the way of this dissertation both sheds light on First Nations identity discussions and honours the two worlds that I walk in. Indigenous research methodologies supported by my conceptual framework guided data collection and analysis. In support of this, I rely on Margaret Kovach (2010) when she discusses characteristics that distinguish Indigenous theories from Western knowledge systems in her book, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*. Indigenous theories are those located in culturally contextual sites that are organic in nature, not forced, flexible, critical, and focused on change. It is essential to include community in research work and to be mindful of how findings are sometimes at risk of an interpretation that can generalize a specific group's experience. Kovach reminds the Indigenous researcher that a theorist on Indigenous worldviews must have an understanding of the cultural epistemic foundations that come with lived experience. IMs should be critical, focus on change, be user-friendly, and be relate-able – the goal should be rigorous research that can be understood by all (Kovach, 2010). Such knowledge is grounded in mutual understanding and the exploration of new dialogues between First Nations, non-First Nations, and the Federal Government.

Work by Indigenous academics, such as Linda Tuhiwai-Smith and Margaret Kovach, guided this research project. IM researchers have the freedom to adapt research

to make space for visual, symbolic, and metaphorical representations to go alongside narrative data (Kovach, 2010). Using Indigenous ways of knowing and being while avoiding research that is extractive (ie. removing or extracting information without thought toward reciprocity) highlights fundamental differences in the ways of knowing between IM and Western qualitative methodologies. These differences ignite "philosophical, ideological, and methodological conflicts for Indigenous researchers" (Kovach, 2010, p. 29). As an example, IMs appear in my approach to data collection, member-checking, and co-researcher ownership of their transcripts which is a feature of all qualitative research as well. This ownership was explicit and check-ins with co-researchers reiterated my commitment to avoiding extractive research.

Integration of qualitative approach.

IM supported the decision-making that went into data collection procedures and interview protocols, which resulted in a comprehensive research design. Talking about identity at such a granular level is a new direction for understandings around First Nations identity. Knowledge of identity and well-being is best understood through the stories and personal reflections found in this work. In this dissertation you will see that Indigenous knowledge is created, shared, and maintained amongst group members and should be honoured by holding it to be valid and true for those with lived experience. While individual interviews allowed the space, time, and safety for co-researchers to share their perspectives, the focus group provided co-researchers with insights from others on the topic. The focus group was conducted after individual interviews to facilitate the discussion on identity and well-being from multiple perspectives; this opened a door to an exchange of knowledge that is so valuable to this work. With First

Nations identity being a conversation that is generally kept quiet, my intention, as an Indigenous researcher, was to bring co-researchers together to share their experiences and knowledge.

Research that I previously completed in my Masters uncovered recurring thoughts about *Indian Act* definitions of identity and what impact it has made in history and what impacts it has made on First Nations women. The women in my master's study noted that the definitions of eligibility to be a member of a Nation are largely based on *Indian Act* definitions and often used to validate membership. Common themes when speaking to individuals about the Indian Act and the impact that it has had both at the level of individual and society draw attention to the occurrence of validation demands; the process by which legislation has become internalized over time (King, 2011). Over time, this internalization becomes a point of contention when Nations utilize Federal Government legislation to define their membership. It should be noted that some Nations have gained the power to define their own membership, however, permission to do so must be obtained from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (King, 2011). In this study, interviews and focus groups were used to collect information on First Nations identity to gain insight that might inform the unique experience of identity for the 634 First Nations groups across Canada or, at the very least, challenge assumptions held by those not directly impacted by identity legislation through the Indian Act. This research only provides a glimpse into a small sample of First Nations experiences; therefore, I find it necessary to state up front that my intent is not to speak for all First Nations and their experiences with the Indian Act. Knowing the identity experience of First Nations people

is essential for the post-colonial (some would argue neo-colonial or continuing colonial) society we live in.

As Paulo Friere notes:

> The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to reject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion. (Friere, 1970, p. 47)

This freedom Friere talks about is the freedom from oppression, which this dissertation argues is spelled out in the pages of the Indian Act: embedded in the definitions of who is an Indian and in the criteria for membership in a Nation your family lineage is tied to. To further this point, membership impacts well-being on a psychological level when you consider the implications of not feeling fulfilled by the benefits that come from a solid identity. Narratives and story sharing through interviews and focus groups are powerful tools that will inform while empowering First Nations people to continue sharing stories of identity and politics. Speaking about experience and sharing of story brings this dissertation to a critical point in time where we can only learn by sharing our narratives amongst ourselves and with those who are committed to learning more.

Ethical Concerns.

The topic of identity is deeply personal for me as the researcher. For this reason, it was imperative for me to privilege the voices of the co-researchers in this work and to

undertake thorough member-checking to ensure my interpretation of their words was correct and unimposing. Extra consideration was also given to confidentiality because of the nature of the topic and the communities to which we belong. Northern BC communities are small in size and tight-knit in nature, making it possible to connect stories to their source. Confidentiality was maintained with each person selecting an identifier to be matched with their audio recordings/transcripts and notes. The co-researchers voiced their appreciation to choose how they would be identified in this work. There were a few instances in which portions of stories were removed on co-researcher request to protect their identity.

Co-Researchers.

This dissertation centres around story, relationships, and the co-researchers who shared their stories of identity with me. I chose to use "co-researcher" terminology in this work is a show of respect and acknowledgment of those who undertook this journey with me; there is no expert in this work, rather we are all experts in our own experiences. Due to the sensitive nature of identity, interviews took place one-on-one and in safe spaces chosen by the co-researcher. Only after meeting or chatting in private was the option for a focus group explored and offered to the co-researchers.

As an Indigenous researcher with a personal connection to the discourse around identity, it was crucial for me to take steps to ensure I was privileging the voices of others over my own. The co-researchers in this work had a voice on both the research process and how they wanted to participate in the research. Having options around data collection was integral for safety in this work: each co-researcher selected how and where they wanted to participate. This included them selecting a location they were comfortable in

while also easy to access and whether they wanted somewhere private. Co-researchers could choose to share their stories via interview, focus group, or photo-voice (photo-voice was later removed due primarily to lack of interest). Presenting options to co-researchers was incredibly important to me because cultural knowledge on these topics take many forms and be presented in different ways. I was thorough in asking for co-researcher direction because it was how I would have liked to be invited to share my story.

I made contact with the ten co-researchers in BC through either a direct or mutual connection. One contacted me to ask if I was still working on the topic of identity and expressed her desire to share more after participating in my master's research. Seven traced their lineage within BC and three traced their lineage to Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Contact was made in a variety of ways: posters advertising the research, personal contact, and mutual acquaintances. In total, six women and three men contributed to this research.

To honour the experiences that each co-researcher shared with me, I decided to include excerpts of narratives shared to privilege their voice over my interpretation of their voice. The deeply sensitive nature of identity experiences and my own understanding of that experience led me to take a step back and let the actual lived experience come through with discussion on the narratives woven throughout. In the findings section you will read the voice of those that live the experience of First Nations identity every day: you will hear their positive experiences, the negative experiences, how their identity definitions were shaped or how they changed over time, and how they

believe society views them. You will read stories of triumph over racial microaggressions and discrimination, alongside stories of self-discovery and pride.

In light of recruiting co-researchers to this work, some of the co-researchers contacted me because they knew of my previous work, some were recruited through co-researchers who had already met with me, and some I recruited because I had heard their story and intentionally reached out to them. Not every person contacted was interested in the work or felt that it was the right time. The decision to proceed with the nine co-researchers was made due to time constraints and because saturation of themes was sturdy with similar narratives occurring between co-researcher data. It was important to me as an Indigenous researcher, to privilege all the voices from those who wanted to be a part of this work. For these reasons, my evaluative criteria for co-researcher selection remained open but specific to people who wanted to talk about their experience with First Nations identity and potentially ignite a discussion that is largely missing from identity frameworks.

Cultural values: Setting the context.

In this section I highlight my reasoning behind building a base of cultural values that guided the research process and the writing of this dissertation. A focus on cultural values kept me grounded throughout the research and reminded of me of the intent to share an experience in a respectful and responsible way.

> The Abalone has a special place in my baskets of knowledge for many reasons. Most importantly, in order for *Māori* (Indigenous of *Aotearoa,* New Zealand) people to gain food sustenance from the (*mōana*) ocean, our (*karakia*) prayers and (*waiata koroua*) ancient chants must be in place – we are thankful to *Tangaroa*

> (Guardian of the Sea) for all that he provides within the ocean, we are thankful to *Papatuanuku* (Mother Earth) for allowing us to enter the grounds where the ocean is located, we are thankful to *Ranginui* (Sky Father) for the weather he provides, and we acknowledge the three baskets of knowledge(s): 1) *kete-uruuru-matua* (basket of peace, goodness, and love; 2) *kete-uruuru-rangi* (basket that contains prayers, incantations, and rituals), and 3) *kete-ururu-tau* (knowledge of the peaceful arts that promote the welfare of mankind and of war). These baskets represent the three divisions of knowledge that can be applied to many theoretical frameworks. (T. Fraser, personal communication, May 2018)

Dr. Fraser highlights the importance of cultural protocols and safety. Respecting traditional practices and protocols is critical to relationality, as described in the opening. The relationships between the embodied water and food are some of many basic needs that humans require. There is the interconnectedness between the guardians spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. Therefore, it is within these protocols that I adhere to the uniqueness of my own values and beliefs as a Tsimshian member and researcher.

There are nine critical values that must be noted prior to my exploring the depth and cultural safety of my research: 1) relationality, 2) respect, 3) cultural protocols, 4) cultural safety, 5) cultural knowledge, 6) cultural tradition, 7) engagement, 8) cultural relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity, and 9) resilience. At the core of these values, I began with a Tsimshian term, Bilha'a which means **A**balone. The term **B**ilha'a is used to support each of the critical values that guided this work value for various reasons which I will elaborate on further. Each of these tenets draws upon my vision of **A**balone and the connection to my **B**utton **B**lanket, which is adorned with abalone. **R**aven is situated in the

centre of the **B**utton **B**lanket and surrounded by a design that makes me think of water and my traditional name, Hadiksm Gaax (translation: Swimming Raven). These values along with Raven and my button blanket reverberate through this work. To set the context for each of the values, I draw upon the scholarly works of Indigenous people who have helped shape my dissertation.

Bilha'a – Relationality. Wilson (2008), an Opaskwayak Cree scholar, reminds us that the importance of relationships or relationality of Indigenous ontology and epistemology is rooted in a way of being. I agree with this sentiment, particularly in the case of my identity. What makes me a Tsimshian relates to my environment growing up, the traditions that have been practiced since time immemorial, the customs that help shape my ways of knowing and being, and most of all, the interconnectedness to land, people, and places. There is so much to be said about relationality in terms of who we are, not just as clanship, but as human beings. We are connected to the environment, eco-systems, animals, birds, and all things that are imbued with spirit, energy, and synergy.

Bilha'a – Respect. Gardner (2012), a Sto'lo educator, gives a broad definition to one of her Four "R"s: respect. Respect is a common term used by Elders and communities and, for the purpose of this dissertation, I want to use the term wisely to draw upon the importance of relationships or relationality amongst the co-researchers. I am cognizant that when one or a group from a community shares their stories, one must be culturally respectful of traditions, protocols, practices, storytelling, singing, dancing, prayers and/or incantations. It is not unusual for researchers to enter communities and to just expect stories. There are many communities that are unsure if they should share ancestral practices or stories for fear of breaking family traditions.

Bilha'a – Cultural protocols. Cultural protocols and processes were shaped by ancestral knowledge and practice from a time prior to colonization and have been reshaped over time by the generations that followed. I adhere to any protocols that require cultural practices, particularly prior to engaging with people and their territories. Most importantly, a good researcher will find out the "do's and dont's" of the area before they begin. For example, wearing certain garments, such as hats, in a building or shoes worn inside. It is most important to watch and learn from community members.

Bilha'a – Cultural safety. Ramsden (2002), a Māori professor who coined the term "cultural safety," pleaded with the health educators in the late 1980's that "*you talk about ethical safety*, *legal safety*, and *physical safety*, but what about *cultural safety*?" Her concerns were the unequal distribution of health care amongst the Māori population. The example she provided involved three Māori patients with *type 2 diabetes mellitus,* all on metaformin; therefore, "let's treat them all the same." Cultural safety in the context of this dissertation refers to the needs of the co-researchers who were gracious enough to share their lived experiences of what it means to be living under the gaze of colonization. They informed me of their uniqueness, their stories, disconnection from self-identity, disenfranchised from society, and dislocated from a place of being and knowing. It was my responsibility to take what they have offered and to inform better practices.

Bilha'a – Cultural knowledge. Knowing our culture is imperative to living well and knowing the self. Lived experience of the teachings around my culture and continuously building my knowledge base has made me acutely aware of the fact that this connection is a privilege. Not everyone has access to their cultural knowledge and it may

not be an easy learning experience for all. This cultural value made me aware of those differences and how to walk in a good way.

Bilha'a – Cultural tradition. Cultural traditions bind people together. Shared histories, shared identity, and shared traditions are maintained and passed down. Traditions give a group meaning while facilitating protective factors of belonging.

Bilha'a – Engagement. Knowing how, when, and why to engage is critical to the research process. Research is a dirty word in the Indigenous community due to years of poorly done research and a lack of genuine engagement. Research and relationships take time. The lessons imparted through stories may not be explicit at the time of telling; the learning may happen much later.

Bilha'a – Cultural relevance, cultural responsibility, and reciprocity. These values are derived from Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991). They are grouped together because of their interconnectedness. In my worldview, they cannot be separated.

Bilha'a – Resilience. The final value has guided me from the beginning of the work to the end. Resilience is key when addressing Indigenous experiences and impacts on health. Far too often we are exposed to deficits and quantitative measures intended to extrapolate how "bad" things are or how much suffering there is. This research celebrates resilience through the shared stories on identity. The co-researchers are resilience, I am resilience, and my children are resilience in action.

My definition of methodology is based on my own lived experience, gaining new information, and learning how to emancipate my own process of understanding my realities, my Tsimshian ways of knowing and being. This means bringing it to life

through the Button Blanket, borrowing from schools of thought that fit within my definition of IMs, and using Raven as my guide.

Raven, the Trickster.

Raven is the trickster character in many First Nations stories. His actions and intentions teach lessons about moral behaviour as the audience witnesses his mistakes, miss-steps, and frustrations. As an Indigenous researcher I am drawn to metaphors, creation stories, and meaning-making that goes beyond surface- level understandings of the world around me. I grew up hearing stories of Raven. My family on my mother's side belongs to the Ganhada (Raven clan), which offers a personal connection to my research framework and cultural values. Raven also reminds me to avoid the self-serving or immoral path in research because his/her nature is mischievous and not typically considerate of others. In stories, we witness the false steps taken by Raven and we learn how to live and be good through the lessons of Raven's mistakes.

The imagery of Raven on my Button Blanket is also a physical representation of my theoretical framework and cultural values. I was gifted a button blanket as well as a name in 2008 upon my completion of a Bachelor of Science degree. The name given to me was Hadiksm Gaax and the blanket design is of Raven adorned with abalone shells. Abalone shells are beautiful on the inside, but the outside is rough and shows battle scars from surviving in rough surf areas. I mention this as a metaphor to this work. The outside of our experiences (our stories) can be hard and undergo harsh challenges from the outside world (historical and contemporary assimilative efforts and/or the misconception/misunderstanding of Fist Nations identity). However, the resulting abalone shell is made up of those experiences, that history, and a strong ancestral/blood

memory that guides us to be who we were intended to be (stemming back to similar knowledge processes discussed by Aristotle on Eudaimonia). The inside of the abalone shell is made up of those deeply rooted axiologies and epistemologies that guide everyday life. The inside of the abalone, is beautiful, delicate, but safely enclosed by the shell of cultural identity that can be attacked, survive rough surf, but remain resilient and intact.

Research Process

The progression of this research followed three stages to obtain richness of data and co-researcher input throughout. The process was intentionally designed to meet three overall goals: make a contribution at the legal- and policy-level to improve the lives of First Nations people in Canada, make space for the awareness of unique identity experiences and increase the understanding of traditional ways of knowing in Canadian society, and empower First Nations people to openly reflect on their identity and well-being in a safe space.

To achieve the overall goals, the individual interview was essential to acquire personal lived-experiences to draw upon when it came to theme identification. Co-researchers had the opportunity to meet me in an informal environment to address the research questions in their way. The initial meeting with co-researchers provided an introduction to the research and an opportunity to review their rights in participating in the research. All interviews were recorded and transcribed into a document that was shared with the co-researcher during the member-checking stage. Note-taking was done for each individual interview and the focus group to identify information that was

emphasized or repeated; this supported initial analysis and allowed me to undertake constant comparative method as more interviews took place.

In the final stage of qualitative data collection, co-researchers were offered an opportunity to participate in a focus group and photo-voice. The focus group was informal with some structure to address themes that arose in the interviews. The function of the focus group was to espouse of the collective nature of First Nations traditional knowledge, ways of knowing, and sharing of an identity. First Nations knowledge is not an individual process; rather, knowledge is shared and maintained through collective values. The one focus group, though small in the case of this research, made space for knowledge/experience to be shared in a smaller group setting which provided the opportunity for idea and experience sharing. The focus group addressed key themes that were identified during analysis of the individual interviews, providing a level of validation.

Toward the end the of data collection phase, it became apparent that the photo-voice originally planned was not something of particular interest to the co-researchers after individual interviews and the focus group were completed. Several co-researchers brought forth valid concerns on the usefulness of photo-voice or confusion with what kind of images they could provide. After attempts to recruit additional co-researchers proved to be unsuccessful, the photo-voice data collection was terminated prior to any photos being taken. Co-researchers were informed of this change and no negative responses were received. Two of the co-researchers expressed relief due to time constraints that would have prevented their participation after agreeing in the consent form. This revealed a strong indication that co-researchers preferred the individual

interview format and setting. However, I would not rule out photo-voice for a prospective study in the future.

Criteria for co-researcher selection.

I recruited co-researchers through one of two methods. Some of the co-researchers were familiar with my master's thesis and others were recruited simply by inviting suggestions from co-researchers or by reaching out as the researcher. These methods of recruitment were intentional and leveraged some control over selecting individuals who were in a mindset to talk about their identity. My personal connection to reflection on identity and my experience during my master's thesis supported me in identifying co-researchers for whom this topic was not only relevant but those who would enjoy a safe space to reflect on their identity. Prior to beginning this doctoral work, a few co-researchers expressed their interest in speaking further and asked to be contacted and included if I pursued my exploration of identity experiences. The ultimate goal of this work was to present an experience in such a way to begin a larger and more prolonged conversation on First Nations identities in the 21st century.

Consent.

All stages of qualitative data collection were introduced in my first meeting with each co-researcher to allow the individual to be fully informed and consider how much participation they hoped to have. In the first meeting with each person, it was explicitly stated that they had and would retain the right to remove their information from the research at any time and they had the right to cease their participation for any reason. I also ensured each person that the consent form they filled out was an evergreen document that could be changed or added to as they saw fit during the data collection phase. The

use of identifiers and/or pseudonyms allowed each person to select their preferred level of anonymity. Co-researchers could choose between using their real name, initials, or a pseudonym. The co-researchers voiced their appreciation to choose how they would be identified in this work. There were a few instances in which portions of stories were removed on co-researcher request to protect their identity. With safety and co-researcher power at the forefront when considering recruitment, the research was designed to let each co-researcher decide how much time and information they felt comfortable to share.

Interviewing.

Eight co-researchers chose to participate through individual interviews. Locations varied for each person and included a coffee shop in downtown Vancouver, personal homes, office spaces at work, and in study rooms in colleges and universities. To achieve credibility and authenticity as an Indigenous researcher with an investment of time thinking about identity in much the same way as the co-researchers, I chose to respond to the interview questions myself. The research questions were given to the co-researchers in advance of their interview for transparency and ultimately for their safety (knowing questions ahead of time):

1. How would you define your First Nations identity? Is it different from Indian Act legislation on Status eligibility criteria?
2. Does the Indian Act play a role in your identity? If so, explain how it impacts your identity or other components of your life.
3. Is cultural identification important in your life? To your well-being as a person?
4. How does knowing your cultural identity impact your overall well-being? How does knowing who you are and who your People are make you feel?

    a. Can you think of an example where knowing who you are and where you come from made you feel good? Explain.
    b. Can you think of an example where it made you feel bad? Explain.
5. How do you think society perceives First Nations people in Canada? Why do you believe this? Where do you think this perception comes from? Can you think of something that supports these feelings?
6. Do you have any further comments on a link between identity and well-being for First Nations people?

Focus group

Co-researchers were informed about the opportunity to participate in the interview, focus group, and photo-voice with an information sheet/consent form at our first meeting. The goal of the focus group was to offer a platform to discuss First Nations identity, status, and well-being in a group setting to allow for experiences of others to build upon stories being shared. Due to the highly relational nature of First Nations identity, the focus group served a greater purpose than just obtaining a large amount of information at one time. An unintended benefit allowed me as the researcher to observe how identity experiences are shared, similar, relational, and shaped by those who we see as familiar. The co-researchers were informed in advance that due to the nature of a focus group, their confidentiality could not be guaranteed; this was essential to recruitment and co-researcher safety. This form of data collection will allow participants to hear responses from others and have the opportunity to engage in a safe environment. Discussion points were based on the research questions and initial themes arising out of data analysis from individual interviews to gain depth of understanding and to flesh out

further complex topics. These were the questions presented to the co-researchers at the focus group:

1. a) How do you define your identity? Does it change in different situations/places?
   b) How does status impact your well-being?
2. What is the one thing you would tell someone who does not understand status about the role it plays in First Nations people's lives?

Data Analysis

Qualitative research has increasingly been recognized and valued as a means to generating knowledge around the human experience. The benefits of Thematic Analysis (TA) lie in the freedom to explore experiences from the perspectives of those providing the information. A popular choice among qualitative researchers due to its accessibility and flexibility in moving through data sets with the intent to locate meaningful and recurring themes. Thematic Analysis offers insight through identifying idiosyncratic meanings and patterns (themes) across data sets (Braun and Clarke, 2019). It was useful to employ TA to this work because of the shared/lived experience between the co-researchers in their responses to questions around their identity. As with any qualitative form of research, this project guided by IM has the end goal of producing information that is useful and gathered in a rigorous manner (Nowell et al., 2017).

Thematic analysis of the interview and focus group data took place throughout the data collection period and for a year after to accommodate member-checking. Interview data was always reviewed and transcribed immediately while content was fresh and front

of mind for me as the researcher. I began to track recurring themes, meaningful statements, and key findings both within and between transcripts of the co-researchers stories. The theoretical freedom implicit to TA created space for this work to be modifiable and flexible to the needs of the co-researchers and myself. Some of this analysis occurred during transcription and began shaping my understanding of the experiences shared. Moving fluidly through thematic analysis allowed me to revisit interviews, bring topics to the focus group, and return once more to the interviews with co-researchers during the member-checking phase. The member-checking phase was essential for ensuring messaging was correct, strong, and consistent. Achieving saturation validated the themes arising in the work and supported a deeper/more granular understanding of First Nations identity. While the interview numbers were not as high as I had initially hoped for, the repetition of themes between co-researchers and the validation heard in the focus group led me to believe saturation on the specific themes noted in this dissertation had in fact been met. A future research project could focus on some of the specific themes identified in this dissertation. First Nations thinking about identity could inform directions of inquiry for theory development on the topic of identity experience for this group in Canada (Green et al., 2007).

Analysis can be approached several ways based on a researcher's intention (e.g., if an individual is inclined to merely locate a hypothesis and retest it for validity or if the goal is to generate theory that may be quantifiably tested at some point in time). This work is the beginning of a new direction of inquiry and, as a result, I initially reflected on components of Grounded Theory (GT) within my IM as a step towards developing this work into a future project aimed at extrapolating information at an abstract level to

eventually create a theory on identity. As an Indigenous researcher I am inclined to take a cyclical approach to data collection and analysis as opposed to linear forms. For this reason, the idea of thematic analysis and tracking where the co-researchers' stories were taking me was a necessary step that was affirmed through member-checking and reviewing emerging themes with each co-researcher.

Transcribing each of the interviews enhanced the extent to which I was able to become familiar with recurring themes within and between co-researcher stories. This also impacted my understanding of how identity can change even with simple reflection and talking out an experience. Due to this research being an exploration into a new field, shaping a more concise idea of identity as a fluid concept, I chose to embed member-checking and thematic analysis together to ensure significant emerging themes were not overlooked and that I was on the right path.

Additionally, thematic analysis benefits from researcher reflexivity which is also a required component of qualitative work in general. Due to my personal tie to this work, it was essential for me to take the time to identify reasoning and rationale for pursuing specific directions in the research. This self-critical account of the journey created space for me to identify my values and insights on my personal experience with the topic of identity (Nowell et al., 2017).

The second stage of analysis, integration of categories, was a long process due to the difficulty in categorizing responses in a way that did not take away from or ignore other/diverse responses in separate questions. An example of diversity in response to questions was in how someone defined their identity in the first question but after proceeding through their responses to the questions that asked for more depth and

experience, you could see a shift in how a co-researcher was thinking about their identity simply by engaging with it over a span of time. These first steps of analysis were essentially a large narrative puzzle being broken down into smaller pieces of data, which are similar in content but different due to context and personal experience.

In the second year of data collection, I began working on the emerging themes, which required immersion in the co-researchers narratives, member-checking, and having follow up meetings where I began to talk about what I saw emerging from the work. I brought my initial thematic analysis and working codes to each of the co-researchers for input and to check if I had missed anything in their story. After this stage I began to solidify the emerging theory and the recurring themes.

Responses that appeared more than once (exact wording or paraphrased) were identified and highlighted for reference. As more interviews were completed, I used field notes that highlighted specific recurring themes between co-researchers. These field memos contained a running list of recurring and emerging themes. After transcription was complete, I returned to each co-researcher with the intent to be member-checked. One of the first memos made was how identity definitions changed when co-researchers reflected on their own identity developing, coming to know, or changes in geographical space. Once major themes were identified, I further categorized the groupings of themes into larger categories with similar connotations. The succession of steps in thematic analysis were: a) transcription, b) identifying initial themes, c) member-checking, and d) comparison between co-researcher experiences. Enlisting open-coding and member-checking was essential to privileging co-researcher voices without imposing preconceived notions. Selective and focused coding facilitated the analysis stage and

emerging co-researcher experience was solidified and validated. I used the constant comparative method for not only my analysis but for the member-checking with co-researchers, as well. This allowed me to check-in and remain accountable to the co-researcher voice. Constant comparative method was imperative because of my personal tie to this work, I had to insure co-researcher voice was being privileged throughout. A systematic breakdown of data allowed me to memo on each emerging category or sub-categories as they appeared and facilitated my choice to undertake theoretical sampling among co-researchers.

Evaluative Criteria

Reflective thought was critical to this work because of my personal ties to the topic of identity. I spent the majority of my time interacting with the co-researchers transcripts undertaking thematic analysis. Part of this work also included reflecting on my own experience, who I was in this work as the researcher, and what I had hoped the co-researchers would leave with. Some of the questions I asked myself throughout were:

1. How I would share my story?
2. What emotions could be elicited when thinking about identity?
3. What needs to be considered when sharing stories in a way that does not paint a generalized picture of the identity experience for First Nations?
4. How do I ensure I am privileging Co-Researcher voice and not my own?

As an Indigenous researcher with a very personal tie to this topic and sharing similar experiences with the co-researchers, my ultimate goal was to do qualitative research in a way that was trustworthy, credible, and authentic. Alongside these

considerations is the need to respect the people and the stories that are shared in this work. The intent of this work was to shift away from legislated Status as maintained within the *Indian Act,* but not to forget about it completely. For consistency, the research questions were used for both individual interviews and to guide the focus group. Time was dedicated to the design of each question to avoid repetition while slowly unpacking a granularity of identity experiences that are not at the surface of everyday discussions. Each question was also designed to facilitate an informal dialogue between individuals with stories to share on a lived experience in a safe environment. The stories in this work are not my own but are those of people I consider colleagues and respected individuals who have a similar experience with the wicked topic of complex First Nations identity(ies) in the face of legal frameworks.

Reading Whittmore, et al. (2001) enabled me, as a qualitative researcher, to follow tenets of credibility and authenticity while being cognizant of interpretative validity in my analysis of the narratives in this work. Interpretation was an essential component of analysis that I remained mindful of throughout my reflections on the interview data. My personal connection to this work and the value I place on responsible research as an Indigenous woman doing research, was a constant reminder to check myself and confirm findings and direction of the work with my co-researchers. The focus group (or sharing circle) was a tool used to ensure consistency of information being shared on identity experiences. The focus group fit nicely into this work and research has shown that this method of data collection is defined as a qualitative Indigenous research method (Lavallee et al., 2009) fostering a safe environment. For topics like identity and well-being, which can be highly person-based, there should be space to share and receive

knowledge. It is important to remember that cultural knowledge on identity and well-being are concepts that are collectively understood as a community. These are not constructs that are simply individual-based and revealed in quiet office-spaces of an academy. For this reason, I see the focus group as being highly valuable to the process of understanding identity and well-being in the setting that removes pressure and ensures safety in a discussion.

Chapter 4: Findings

The nine co-researchers who contributed to this work have an incredible knowledge base due to their lifetime of lived experiences that span anywhere from two and six decades. Their cumulative experience provides a broad example of what it has been like and what it is like today to be First Nations in Canada. In this chapter you will read the narratives associated with each of the research questions to ensure the voices of the co-researchers come through, as their voices are privileged in this work.

Of the nine co-researchers, eight shared their experiences in interviews and two shared in a focus group. Among the eight individuals interviewed and the two who participated in the focus group, there were significant differences in their personal reflections on identity and experiential information that each drew upon in their narrative. Of the ten co-researchers seven were female and three were male. The male group was a young cohort between 20 and 30 years old at the time of the interview and all had experience growing up in the Lakes District of Northern BC. The female group was far more diverse in age, experience, and First Nation: ranging from their mid-twenties to over 50 and with roots from First Nations across British Columbia and into Alberta,

Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Each of the co-researchers came to this work and sharing opportunity in a different way. Without identifying co-researchers directly, there were several who knew of my Masters research done in 2011 and were interested in continuing the discussion about who they are and how they have come to define their identities. My experience with the co-researchers was mutually beneficial in the spirit of sharing stories and experience on our identity journeys. Those who spoke to me about my research had (and may continue to have) a keen interest in understanding the experiences they are having with their identity.

Identity is complex and is built from a lifetime of immersed thought on one's social, cultural, and personal life. Development and reflection are key support mechanisms utilized by individuals while they explore and define their identities based on available life information. The most important thing to remember is that identity is also fluid, we are continually taking in information that feeds into and contributes to how we see ourselves/place ourselves within our physical and social environments. Young adulthood is a significant time for personal identity development as youth explore the meaning and knowing of self. The unique focus of this work is on the First Nations individual in Canada who undergoes identity development somewhat differently. Identity is influenced by the personal self-concept, social inputs, but also the political interferences that exist within both community relations and with the Federal Government through the *Indian Act*. Those informing this work shared experiences that support the existence of each of these influences on identity for First Nations people, usually at diverse levels of importance, but existing nonetheless.

Privileging Co-researcher Voice: How do you define your identity?

The co-researchers in this work take precedence. This was an intentional decision alongside the amount of time taken by each co-researcher to select and/or approve parts of their transcript to be included in the final product. Identity has been a conversation not had out in the open for far too long, for this reason I worked with my committee to locate ways to privilege the voice of the co-researchers. Some input was also provided by the co-researchers when I asked how they would like to not only be identified in the work (names, pseudonyms, initials, etc) but also what initial themes they identified with when reflecting on the stories they shared with me. Certainly, there are times that status does not matter - living day to day and not being concerned about another number on an ID card. It does exist, it is there, but it is not always front and centre in the mind. A simple definition of identity does not exist. With identity comes a history, a lived experience, and a reflection on meaning behind events in life. For this reason, I have provided the narratives from eight personal interviews with the co-researchers to highlight the diversity in how First Nations people identify. Prior to introducing the themes, I asked for permission from each of the co-researchers to have their definition of their identity at the forefront of the section on findings. To privilege their voice and provide readers with the unedited and diverse definitions of First Nations identity, the excerpts from the transcripts follow.

Individual interviews: How do you define your identity?

In this section you will read the raw data from each co-researcher's responded to the first question. The knowledge herein reveals the complexity of First Nations identity

and the process by which people come to know who they are. Reading the words here also reveals the added complexity of shifting identity, how a story unravels and shifts by simply making space for dialogue.

> How I define my identity is how I grew up, how I was raised. I do have a non-Aboriginal mother and a Wet'suwet'en Gitsxan father and we predominantly grew up on the reserve in Morricetown and she was welcomed into the community, for the most part. We participated in feasts, I participated in gutting and skinning animals and during the fish season, drying the fish, canning the fish, prepping all of it and learning all of the values that come with that and being immersed. I was just so lucky, looking back on my life of being able to be immersed in that culture…our parents never said anything negative about how we were raised, about our culture, or anything. It was really healing for my father and especially my grandmother because she also took a part in raising us as well when they were working. I define my culture and my First Nation status and all of that, my identity, by the values and the culture that I was brought up in and a big component of this as well is starting to recognize my non-Indigenous side. My mom, she'll make a comment like, "you're also British and French as well, right?! Don't forget that!" You know, I think that's been something that was kind of pushed to the backside, to the back burner for so long. It was her goal to make sure I learned and knew French, so I went through French immersion so I could communicate with my grandfather better 'cause he was from Quebec and… my identity is my life! How I was raised, the trials that I went through and my First Nations identity, you know, like it's… it can't be defined by a number on paper

for me! You know… it's nice to be recognized 'cause I remember going out to fish in the Morricetown canyon and not having status and being like "well dad… What if they catch me!?" he's like "tell them your status card is 350lbs and it's up at the house!" So, it was like… okay, so right from the get-go like, my dad you know… he was always telling me to push the limits you know? Telling me to test the system and he's like "that number doesn't define who you are! Right?" And it doesn't! (AG, Interview, 2015)

To define my First Nations identity… is such a loaded question because when I was thinking about this… it's taken me many, many years to even define a portion of what I think my First Nations identity is because it's been so convoluted over the years. Right? Because I always think it's a definition of what society thinks I am, of what media and TV … thinking that that's the part that I fit in… umm, my father was German and my mother is Carrier so… and I was raised by my father so getting the idea from him of the racism against First Nations people, as hard as that is to believe… also kind of formed my identity of myself… of um, who I thought I was and who I thought I didn't want to be, especially First Nations. If I had to define it now, and where I am now, I would define my First Nations identity as being very strong, proud, and belonging… because I think it's the first time in my life that I actually feel like I belong to a First Nations identity… where I didn't feel like I fit in any given box… where I felt First Nations people should fit. I didn't know where I fit! And definitely, is that different from the *Indian Act* legislation on status eligibility criteria? Oh yes! Yes,

I look at the *Indian Act* as straight forward, here's your number, here's your status card, here's where you should live… um, it's defined that we are to take care of you, we are to provide you with an education, you can't do any of this on your own, you are under our legislation… uhm, and there is no… there is no identity in that! I don't feel… but unfortunately that's the identity that's given to society as a whole to look at First Nations people so yeah… it's very different! It's very different, especially in how First Nations people see themselves compared to how society sees them because that legislation piece is how society looks at status Indians. (Beverly, Interview, 2015)

It's different from *Indian Act* legislation on status eligibility criteria. But at one point in time I think that would have been… my no would have been less emphatic. That it would have been… I remember when people asked who I was and stuff like that, I remember thinking about like… pulling out my status card and "oh yeah, this is it." But that would have been earlier on in my life. How I would define my identity? "I have it," I suppose is the easiest one. I'm tempted to go the way of like community connections and things of that nature so…your connection to Aboriginal communities and so on and so forth. But I don't know, that doesn't do it justice 'cause there would have been at time in my life where I was not very connected to those things. People would have been like "oh, you're still an Aboriginal person!" And that gave me some sort of meaning. I think more than anything now though it is my relationship to other Aboriginal peoples and other Aboriginal communities… whether they show up in my defined Aboriginal

communities like reserves or not… or if it be like up at UNBC, whether it's a group of Aboriginal people… it's something to do with that. So, you can't… it's tough to poke at, it's a… like a foggy area and I've never been like "oh yeah, that's it!" and been totally confident in that being my First Nations identity. So, early on I would have been like 20% certain for something like that where now we're getting closer to probably like… 60, 70, or whatever. But I absolutely couldn't define it cohesively. (CG, Interview, 2015)

I identify as Cree and Soto or Cree and Anishnabe from Treaty 4. My family is from the Pasqua First Nation. Should I answer the second part of your question? So, I'm non-status Indian according to the *Indian Act*. So, I don't refer to myself that way because it's not empowering. So, yes it is… different. I don't call myself a member of the Pasqua First Nation because it's not true, technically. But I belong to the Cree and Soto people, yeah! I grew up knowing that I was Cree but not really understanding what that meant and a lot of that has to do with the fact… I think… that I never had status, so I never really felt entitled to that part of my identity. And so, so I think that for a long time I was confused about my identity and who I was. But I always knew that I was Cree, but somehow I felt that I was less so or not Native enough or not properly Native and especially looking not stereotypically Native and being able to pass for different cultures or whatever. I kind of never felt like I really belonged in the Native community. I think a lot of that is just connected to the fact that I don't have status and so… uhm, the last few years with Bill C3 I applied for status and didn't get it because of the way the

Indian Act works but… I could explain that more later. But uhm but going through that… process with Indian Affairs and trying to get status and being denied and having to kind of, I guess, figure that out on my own and do a lot of like… soul searching and just sort of nurturing and discovering my identity outside of that. So, uhm… so yeah, it's definitely impacted my life because it's a really confusing thing. On the one hand as a mixed person you have this… like… there's this wonderful aspect of feeling like you belong in lots of communities but also at the same time feeling like you don't belong in all those same communities. And… uhm, it… when people don't know that your Native necessarily you find yourself being a witness to a lot of racism directed towards Native people that people say because they feel safe that they're not in the company of someone who is Native and don't know that you are. And so… that has been really hard on me, especially when I didn't really know any better and I didn't understand the history because we weren't taught it in school! So pretty much until I went to university and started to understand some of those things, my Indigenous identity was sort of like a sore point for myself. (DJ, Interview, 2015)

I would say that it's almost like having a separate identity than personal identity because personally I don't… I kind of view myself more just as like an individual in the cosmos, if you will. In terms of First Nations identity, I would say that it's… uhm… it's been something similar to your experience in like… having to rediscover, or not even rediscover just to discover because of the history and like my grandma, she went to residential school, my mom went to boarding school

and they both left with the mentality that it's better off without the culture. I mean, by "it" I mean the kids, like my mom, she didn't… she doesn't speak Carrier. We grew up off the reserve and when you grow up off the reserve, we also went to the other school. You know you hold on to these narratives and these stories from the past and you like want to identify with that like… all the great chiefs that came before and all the big things that were done in terms of fighting for the land and fighting for rights and stuff like that. So, I always kinda wanna latch on to that in terms of First Nations identity, like the strong sense of pride and not just in terms of like the political-like kind of aggressive, I guess you could say, side but… aggressive is kind of a strong word for that but… not so much just like that like strong, noble, kind of proud Indian side but as like the appreciation for the earth and for the concepts of spirituality and stuff like that. So… uhm… yeah, I don't know. It's kind of funny, too, because in terms of contemporary identity I was just thinking about like how there's this kind of joke about being Indian and like how it's like the whole "Rez" kind of stereotype. So, on the one hand, as an intellectual or I mean, I consider myself somewhat intellectual, intellectual because… uhh I'm getting nervous because of the recorder… There's that sense of wanting to reconnect with the great side of being Indigenous but you look at the contemporary side of it and it's kind of embarrassing in a way because growing up off reserve… going to the so-called white school you look at like… a lot of my cousins, older cousins, I would see in town drunk or whatever and causing a scene in public places and stuff like that. And I would always just wonder like, "Why do they have to be like that? It's so embarrassing" and um…

like I just thought like, “Fuckin’ Indians, why can’t they like get a job?” All of the stereotypes that I see that frustrate me that I hear from non-Indigenous people today, I was guilty of at one point in time because I didn’t understand the history and why things are that way. So, I don’t know, for myself I don’t necessarily say that it’s something I have solidified, it’s a work in progress. You know, understanding the history and the culture of my family and where we come from and who my ancestors were and what kind of things they did. Until more recent years I didn’t realise that on my grandma’s side, her grandpa was one of the guys who helped kind of develop the land in Burns Lake area. (JB, Interview, 2015)

Oh boy! I think when I think about my identity, I always identify myself as Anishnaabe and I don’t think that it was something right away… that I… I think the first time the *Indian Act* actually sort of came up with me was when I was adopted and all of a sudden being Anishnaabe… I don’t know if it became an issue or if it became like something more pronounced. I always knew I was Native, I always knew I was an Indian, I always knew that I had brown skin, that I had dark hair… I always knew. I think the identity part was I knew where I came from so I knew that my mother was Margaret Hill, I knew that my father was Roy (last name removed from anonymity), I knew that my grandparents were Harvey and Mary-Anne, but it wasn’t until later. I was ten when I was adopted out and up ‘til then I’d been in care, since I was 6 months old. So, a lot of the identity, a lot of the things that I thought about… you know… I think being Indian was one of them. I’m not sure that I actually thought about, you know, having any pride in

that or having any stigmas attached to it. We just… we were who we were and it didn't really… it wasn't until later being in foster care that people sort of said, "Oh, you're poor… you're family are alcoholics"… or… and it wasn't until even a couple years ago that I would sort of describe my family as being addicts. It wasn't until I read it…. My brother… actually… my brother posted it and it was just… it was kind of harmful… hurtful, but it was true at the same time. But I had never actually described them that way. And so, for me though… just being… coming from that place I think that… my identity up to that point was just being Anishnaabe. Didn't matter where I lived, it didn't matter who I was living with… and I think that… and I never even really thought about it even in terms of being adopted. I just knew that we were Aboriginal, we were going into a non-Aboriginal home, and it seemed to be special and I didn't realise until later how special that kind of was. And then it wasn't until I was maybe 16 that the *Indian Act* really came into my life and that I realised, "Oh hey, there's something special here about…": 1) Because I was trying to get a status card and I actually had to go through this whole process with the government because I had to deal with being adopted, then there had to be like… family history was brought out again and then it was we needed to go through Indian Affairs to get the card and there was this whole history apparently where my mother had transferred from one band to another and, therefore, we also transferred with her. We didn't know that at that point because I always thought that I came from Laxsull First Nation in Northwestern Ontario. And then, next thing I know they're saying, "No, you're from the Ojibway Nation of Sagkeegn #97," and I was like, "When did that

happen? How did that happen?" And then it was… and then all of a sudden it also became… an opening up of something because, all of a sudden, our band numbers were revealed to us and it wasn't… it wasn't… I don't know. I just… I think when… I haven't really thought about it… but when I think about it now it's just like an envelope was left open right? It was just like something was closed and now it's opened and, all of a sudden, I had a status card. You know… I knew a little bit about my family, what I could remember anyways. But just in terms of realising, "Oh wow… I have full status," but then also realising that from my younger siblings… that there might be issues with them in terms of their status. And then, if we had kids, then there would be further issues with that. So, I think that for me the *Indian Act* came when I was 16 and then… yeah… 'cause that's when I actually had a card you know? I think that there's something about the little card and having come to… there's a question about the card that I have as well but there's things about the card. There's questions about it, there's… I don't know… there's some discomfort there, I think, … in terms of that. But I think that would be it. Is it different from *Indian Act* legislation… my identity? … I think so, you know? I think that my identity is a little bit more than what it says on the card. I think that it also has a little bit more than where I come from. When I think about that question, I think about different layers of who I am. And I think that the *Indian Act* legislation is just a small part of that, it's not the be all end all… it's a small part!" (RLM, Interview, 2015)

This has changed throughout my life. I think once, for me personally, once I started to engage with my community more, that's when it started to change. I grew up in a town that wasn't… didn't have a high percentage of people from my village or my Nation, so I grew up in Burns Lake. My parents were there for work and we were pretty well the only Tsimshian family there. My mother worked with the Aboriginal people there, for the Lake Babine Nation, and from when I was little, I knew I was connected in some way… being it Indigenous or not. Or just because my mom worked with them, I knew there was something there, but I remember as a kid understanding that I was Aboriginal or as I understood as a kid, I was an Indian because I had a status card and that was huge for me! And I remember, I think it was the little things that did it, and it was like going to get gas. I knew we were always going to get gas on the Rez and I remember going to the gas bar and knowing that that's the one we went to because we had status cards. I didn't know why, it's just that's what I knew and I knew that we were Indian because we did that. So, as a child it was totally, if that wasn't there I don't think I could have grasped on to this idea of Indigenous/non-Indigenous… and what it kind of is or meant. As I got older, I started to understand it, started to understand my mom as Aboriginal and that's why I'm Aboriginal. As I really started to learn about my own culture and about our people, not only Tsimshian but about Aboriginal people and our history in Canada…. Our relationship with Canada, our history in these places… it really began to change. And so, now I feel like the status card and the *Indian Act* never defined who I was, it was just a way for me to grab on to something and think, "Okay, that's who I think I am," and it

was kind of like, if we were to refer to finding ourselves as people in general… when we're like teenagers we're angry and we're scrambling for something to relate to, whether it's music or how we dress or all these things. It's kind of like that stage where I was a kid, I didn't know what I was, but I knew I had this card, so that was something. It might not necessarily be you, but it gives you a little piece or glimpse of who you might be… or a piece of this puzzle. As I started to engage with my community more, that's where things really started to make sense. And now, I see myself something completely separate… not completely separate… but when I think of identity, the *Indian Act*, and the status card, and these sorts of things don't even cross my mind. When I think of identity I think of my relationship with my people and my relationship with my land. So when you brought up identity maybe ten years ago I would have thought of things like status card, *Indian Act*, band, and nowadays, what I think about is, "Okay, my house, I belong to my clan, my territory, and who I'm going to feed," and those are the first things that I want to talk about. So, that's that shift that has changed and I believe that's the truth. I believe deep down that's where it comes from for me and it was just… those were stepping stones… the path that I was on, those were the stepping stones that I needed to find who I was. So now, if I were to define identity, it would be how I'm in relationship with everyone else in my community. And how our people did that a long time ago would have been through our clan systems, through our houses and so we would have had, Simgigyet or Simogyet people who were high up. We would have had a working class, we would have had warriors, we would have had these sorts of things, and

all of those were in relationship to how we work with the community, that's how I see myself today. And that's how I identify. I happen to be, my mom's Aboriginal, my father's German… so I'm 50% considered under the *Indian Act*. I think even if let's say my mom was half and my father was German I would be 25%. But, if I still held the same roles within my society… if I still held those same roles, I think my identity would be the same! Because in our belief system, almost every law and every piece of how we work as a people has to do with your relationship with everyone else! So, whether it's not just let's say I belong to a house in a clan and they have a specific territory and I'm going to go harvest from that territory. There's also these little tidbits of rules on how I honour my father's clan and these sorts of things. And I've learned to deal with that because my father's German, my grandfather steps in. And he's taken me in, in our language, Is Laxsgyiik… so I have to honour the Eagles. Everything I do is honoured in this relationship. And that's really how we, how I have come to understand identity now. And on a day-to-day level, my relationship with the *Indian Act* and the government is not as a prominent as my relationship with my family and my village. So, here's an example, abalone's illegal, our government tells us that it's illegal and my family wants me to go harvest abalone, I'm gonna do that. I'm not going to think twice because that's just where my loyalty is. I know that there's all this oppression and this racism that comes out of the *Indian Act* that affects us in our everyday life. But right now, I mean, the effect of my family and my involvement with my family is much stronger than those other things that might have come from the *Indian Act*. Now that might not be the same for people who

have experienced like… residential school trauma like my grandfather. Maybe those things would affect him every day to day and that… those feelings overwhelm his feeling of connection to his family. I wouldn't say that because I feel he's healthy in where he is right now, but that might be the case for some people. For me, I have been privileged to allow that beauty of the relationship with me and my village to overpower any feelings of those other things. So, identity in relation to trauma, racism, all these things, those are all secondary thoughts prior to… before my village and how I fit in my village. And it has to do with my work today and everything, I'm lucky that I'm in a place where I can be that connected with everyone. (SG, Interview, 2015)

Very tangled, I guess. From a legal perspective, I am status First Nations. I get my status through my dad, so I'm registered to his band, which is on Vancouver Island. I definitely identify more as, you know, half-breed or mixed. My mother is white and my dad was First Nations, but I grew up with my mother and my step-father who are both non-Aboriginal. And most of my family is non-Aboriginal, other than my own children, so, you know, my identity as a First Nations person really didn't begin until my late teen years, I guess. I was probably eighteen-ish when I started thinking more about it. I had no contact with my birth father's family, other than an aunt and uncle here and there and having some contact with them. And my only understanding, sort of… of Aboriginal culture, at the time, was living in small Northern communities and hearing what the white people say about them, right? So, it really wasn't a thing that I wanted to share too often. In some ways, other than people always guessing what I was… if I was Italian or

Portuguese or Hawaiian or… whatever it was, right? And if I did challenge people on stuff they were saying, you know, quite often the comment was, "Oh well, that wasn't meant about you… I'm talking about those people, you know" … referring to the people living out on the reserve. And it's like, you know… you know, it never sat right with me but at the time I wasn't confident enough and I didn't have enough knowledge to challenge those types of things. So, coming to Prince George and coming to school for post-secondary is probably where I really first started to identify as being First Nations. Being able to take some classes, meet some professors, start learning more about the history... especially of the Northern BC area, where I have lived a part of my life. So, while I do identify as being First Nations, as being status, you know, I definitely still feel like an outsider in a lot of ways, that you know… my knowledge of my own family history is very limited just because of really having no contact, you know? My mom, she didn't stop it, but it wasn't promoted, and my birth father's family really didn't want to have much contact with me after my mom left him, so… a lot of my knowledge around identity has come from living in this region. Right? Learning from Dakehl Elders and knowledge holders and that; so, it doesn't fit… but it fit better than what I had in high school. On the one hand, I know that I fit in that category, that because my dad could pass his status down, I was eligible for status. You know… I don't have a personal history of what I… and this is my own presumptions… of what I assume most people who have status as having…. You know… having grown up in this area, a lot of the people I know who have status, who sort of grew up in that Indian lifestyle, grow up on reserve, grew up in a very different lifestyle than

> I did. So, I don't know, like… its hard…I'm trying to think of the words. I don't feel I fit because… or I don't feel the *Indian Act* fits me because… I guess its intentions to identify and define people don't fit well with me. Right? That you know, I have two children of my own from two different fathers. I can pass my status on to one, but I can't pass my status on to another. So, despite the fact that I'm the same mother, it's their dads who identify what their identity can be within the confines of the *Indian Act*. So, I guess in some ways it doesn't fit that way, in other ways I have embraced it to benefit myself you know. (TC, Interview, 2015).

Focus group: How do you define your identity?

A small focus group of two co-researchers also contributes to the findings here. An invitation was extended to those who previously completed individual interviews. Five people confirmed their attendance but unfortunate circumstances left one attendee unable to attend due to transportation issues and two came to share some food, but left after a brief introduction to the work: one due to studying for an exam and the other did not disclose why they chose to leave. Two women showed an interest in speaking about identity in a group setting and stayed for 90 minutes. The initial thought was to cancel the focus group but out of respect to the two who travelled to UNBC and stayed, I chose to keep the focus group as scheduled to honour their time, effort, and tremendous reflection on their identity experience. The individual interview questions acted as backup if the conversation halted, but the group decided to talk about their experiences and share stories in a less formal setting. It was apparent before the recording of the focus group began that the discussion would be fruitful, there was a comfort level that allowed for sharing of incredibly personal stories and reflections. Both co-researchers shared identity

experiences that focused on phenotype and the recurrent need to provide proof of identity to complete strangers in their communities.

> And you know, I'm very marginal in Indigenous community. Indigenous is the term that fits for me because I'm not land based anymore. I'm non-status and from two different groups and it's very hard to trace my family history because to survive people hid it until fairly recently. One of my aunties, who was French is now very proudly Cree… You know how it is; people do what they have to do to survive, right? And so, it's really hard to be able to give the proof for having any kind of a status at all. The only way I can trace my family history is through the occasional white guy. I got beat up for being Indigenous, you know. I didn't get it. Growing up, my Dad would say things like, "We're some Indian way back" and you know when you're little you're innocent. When I used to get on the bus as a kid, they used to sing the song "Half-breed," you know… by Cher? My mother is an English woman and says things like, "Well I don't think there is anything wrong with the races but I don't think they should mix because it's hard on the children"… and stonewalls what our heritage is to the extent that my children, from time to time, don't actually believe that we are Indigenous. So, I feel like a fake! I feel as though I can't speak from the place of being an Indigenous person because of all this. The upbringing in the bush, learning how to hunt and fish… when I ran nose to nose with a bear over a berry bush and I said, "Excuse me brother," and slowly backed away with my little sisters behind me. All of that was Indigenous identity and, although it was not identified at the time, I was raised Indigenous… within me now is a core that doesn't have to prove to

> anybody. And I don't think I had that core. What I really grieve is that my children struggle with that identity piece and publicly they will deny it and they will come to me and say, "Are we really?" (LA, Focus Group, April 2016).

> Isn't that the awful thing that you feel you have to prove. I think that's the worst part of all of this. The feel and the need… it underlies all of these questions! We have to prove who we are and who we are not. I went to a powwow with a bunch of my aunties and some of the community Elders. Somebody came up to me and asked me if I had my status card and I asked, "Why? Why do you want to know?" And they said, "Well you don't look Indian," and I said, "Why are you here?" because they didn't look Indian. Why do you feel the need to ask me for a piece of paper to prove who I am just because I look like this? I have no choice, I didn't go and pick my hair colour and skin and everything else. (JG, Focus Group, April 2016).

Out of this focus group I was able to garner similar responses to that which came out of the individual interviews. Similar themes and lines of thought arose in the focus group but with the addition of sharing these stories in a group setting. The group setting positively influenced the dialogue on identity and experiences that the two women had over their lifespan. Though the focus group was small, the presence of more than myself as the researcher was enough to create a safe space for sharing to happen. Sharing experiences in this format was a gift to witness; throughout our time together each of us shared similar experiences, empathy when an emotional story was recounted, and agreeable nods.

My analysis from the focus group further validated the themes noted within the individual interviews

This small focus group provided a glimpse into my overall hope for this research to be shared and discussed amongst people. Even with a small group, the body language, non-verbal cues, and agreeable atmosphere was a validating experience. As an example, though these women had known each other for a few minutes, coming into a space of mutual understanding provided a comfort level to share deeply personal experiences with their identity.

Recurring Themes

The responses show a some of the co-researchers who identify strictly to their Nation and familial ties. Status is a topic that comes up occasionally, but ultimately it played a minimal role in the daily definition for the co-researchers. Active thought around having status or not having status occurred most often when co-researchers shared stories of their First Nations identity being challenged, needing to be validated, or when thoughts of transmitting status to children arose. An example of when status comes up is when phenotype (appearance) or word of mouth is not sufficient proof for others that someone is First Nations. Also, within the responses involving status, there is tension and general discontent with the existence of an external force pushing eligibility criteria. Knowledge and sharing from both the individual interviews and the focus group was categorized into four main themes:

1. Identity Salience and Fluidity
2. Navigating Intersections of Identity and Knowing the Self
3. Internalization, Phenotype, and Pervasiveness of Ongoing Racism

4. Identity as it Relates to Health

Thematic Analysis on both the individual interviews and the small focus group supported the identification of four main themes, each of which is intentionally broad in order to group information grouped together in similar contexts as cohesively as possible.

Theme 1: Identity salience and fluidity.

It should be noted that the intent of this research was not to think in terms of measuring identity achievement or to categorize identity into conceptual boxes. I have intentionally focused this section on identity salience and fluidity in an explicit shift away from measurements of identity. To this end, the knowledge shared here should not be used in a discussion on how "strongly" any person identifies as First Nations. The discussion here on identity salience and fluidity is not to devalue the stories shared with me. Among the differences in stories shared, it became apparent through thematic analysis that similar experiences follow closely with both age and gender. Younger generations among both male and female co-researchers identified the recency of active thought on their identity and were able to provide specific information on what events led to decisions about their identity. Younger co-researchers without children did not express the frustration or problems that may arise with the political aspect of status transmission as part of their identity experience. Though when specifically questioned about whether there would be a situation where status could matter, the younger cohort often responded with thoughts around transmission to future generations and in one instance even to explicit thought into who to partner and have children with.

The definition of salience implies the particular noticeability or prominence of something. Of note, within identity salience is the awareness of multiple parts of identity existing but varying in salience due to the situation, experience, and awareness of place or space for First Nations people. Identity salience, as presented by the co-researchers, was discussed in terms of specific environments, their feelings of safety in specific situations, whether they thought their identity was relevant, and/or whether they perceived information pertaining to their identity would impact the scenario. This theme emerged to varying degrees though worded slightly different. The main message in my notes and reiterated by the co-researchers was the varying nature of disclosing identity and the variables that contributed to an individual decision to share their identity.

More often than not, decisions to disclose identity share the similar overarching consideration of status, as determined by the Indian Act. Having status and not having status are complex categorizations that are not always at the forefront of thought when it comes to First Nations identity.

> "I don't think the government has the right to play a role in my identity!" (AG, Interview, February 2015).

Analysis of interviews quickly revealed that people are comfortable to share their First Nations identity in a situation when they are aware it may come up. All involved in the research were First Nations people and several indicated that status rarely played a role until presented with a scenario in which it might, or in fact did, matter.

> "I'm a 1, Section 6-1, so I can pass my status on to my children if I had children… but if I married my fiancé, who is non-status, right now… then I could still pass it on, but then my children…it would stop there. That would be the end

of it. But yet, if I'd married a First Nations person who was also Status, then our children could pass it on. So, I mean, it's very limiting… very limiting in that sense." (BI, Interview, 2015)

Youth and/or not being in a situation where status transmission was a concern at the time of the interview was as a determining factor for status salience. Learning about the surrounding environment, struggling to fit in, and learning basic skills to support progression to adulthood were often noted as taking precedence. Until an event occurred that ignited thorough thought about status and community membership, status and any considerations around transmission or impacts on identity did not typically happen. As for disclosure of identity, concerns about sharing identity information typically did not arise until someone experienced a discriminating event or through some other explicit event that would inform their future decisions around sharing. Co-researchers noted this in moments of reflection when clarifying their identity definitions. Status was most likely to be a point of contention or at least considered when people who were in a place in their lives to consider status transmission to younger generations. This is not to say that it had never come up for someone who did have children but rather, it was not front of mind when talking about identity and identity politics. For those who were living the truth of considering status transmission or who had lived through a point in their lives where they considered their ability/inability to transmit status to children, the topic was front and centre for discussion. However, probing questions were able to draw out the possibility of status being a concern in the future for those who were not concerned at the time of the interview. While status did matter and co-researchers did acknowledge the presence of

status and transmission in their lives, it typically happened more often than not when put into the context of transmitting status to children:

> [Reflecting on pressure] Oh well, if I don't marry a Native woman then my kids won't be Native… and you know, there goes the culture kind of thing. But culture is not defined by your citizenship but… I don't know, it's funny how it feels like you're kinda being held hostages to who you marry because if you don't you know, marry a Native person then it's like, "Oh well, you're just abandoning your culture"… so, in terms of identity… it does kind of make me a little bit more abrasive I guess towards the state or just kind of discontent with the state. And just knowing the history of the *Indian Act* and how it made the potlatch illegal and how it made sun dancing illegal and made all these things illegal and how people were stuck onto these shitty plots of land that nobody else wanted and… they weren't allowed to leave the reserve at a certain point or had to get permission or had to be back at a certain time. And all these spiritual ties to the land were kind of removed in doing that. So, it plays a role in a sense of looking at the past. But in terms of the future, I guess it's just the whole pressure to… well you know… if I ever have kids… to "you know they should be status" and stuff like that. But it's just… it's so messed up like how it does that. It makes you feel like you have to marry a certain person. (JB, Interview, 2016)

An apparent gender difference among the co-researchers was the description of identity and how identity was portrayed outward in situations. The female co-researchers had a tendency to focus outwardly on their identity and place more concern on social perceptions when it came to awareness and caution. Awareness came through reflection

on societal perceptions of First Nations people's identities and caution was presented as being selective about how much was shared about their identity in new situations. The male co-researchers noted the awareness of how their identity was perceived by society but did not show as much concern for being cautious in sharing identity information. Strong reasoning behind this may be within the *Indian Act* eligibility criteria, which has historically targeted and attacked the identity of First Nations women in their ability to maintain and transmit status.

> [Status] "does play a role when I have to, I guess, identify myself to non-Aboriginal people as Aboriginal… like… it's almost like I have to have that proof and show my status card right?!" (BI, Interview, 2015).

The original sections on status in the *Indian Act* made First Nations women dependent upon men in terms of their identity and their ability to transmit status to their children. The Indian Act linked all decisions around status to the men in First Nations women's lives. As an example, it was common for First Nations men to be presented with various reasons to 'enfranchise' and give up their claim to status. When this enfranchisement happened, the woman who was married to the man and any children he had would automatically enfranchise and lose their status as well. Among the older co-researchers,those with children had been in a position to think about transmitting status to future generations and expressed frustration with that experience without prompting by me as the researcher. All complexities noted by the co-researchers considered, it was imperative for me to include a section on salience and fluidity to acknowledge any number of influences that impact how an individual thinks about their identity at any given moment in time.

Theme 2: Navigating intersections of identity and knowing self.

First Nations people's identity in Canada is influenced by several things: lived experience, personal growth, community politics and belonging, and Canadian politics via the *Indian Act*. Due to this complexity, First Nations people have varying perspectives of what affects their identity or what is most salient at a given point in time. For this reason, identity can change or be emitted differently day-to-day and even situationally. Several competing definitions or challenges can influence how one introduces or defines oneself in a particular place and time. The personal, relational, social, and government legislation components of First Nations identity each have a place in how we think about identity. Each varies between people and across situations.

> I've begun to understand the political implications of my identity and how I choose to identify. So, for example… choosing not to identify as a non-status Indian is a political choice I'm making because I don't believe in the *Indian Act* and so, that's my way of refusing that identity that's been put on us by the colonial state. So, in that sense it's political, but it's also not political in the sense that that's who I am, and it shouldn't… who I am shouldn't be political inherently! Because that's like something that only Indigenous people have to go through and you know… that's the thing I think about white privilege and whiteness as the unseen norm is that it's not… it's apolitical to be white in our society and it's political to be Indigenous, but that's actually really fucked up because you know… this is Indigenous land! It shouldn't be political to be who we are in a homeland! (DJ, Interview, 2016)

The co-researchers each explained their own way of using their individual experience and history with identity to determine what we focus more on. Several co-researchers identified points in their life where status did not matter, these points ranged from timeframes or milestones in their lives to specific scenarios where status identity was not salient, or front of mind, for them at a particular point in the life or even time in the day..

An aspect of this research was to locate ways of identifying that have developed and changed through time for both the individual and the collective. First Nations identity is the only experience in the world where defining one's identity has been attacked and challenged repeatedly. Not only has the definition been challenged, it has been completely replaced with an idea of what a group of people should be, based on false beliefs and information, and forced upon a group in an oppressive and assimilative relationship. Of notable importance, the term *Indian* did not exist prior to contact.

Now, within this work, the co-researchers have shown a full circle way of understanding the history of what it is to be First Nations people. As originally defined, identity was the people, it was the community one was a member of, it was the land/territory, it was our relations. The original definitions of identity remain and are recorded in the interview data.

> Your identity… your cultural identity, how you were raised… you have you know… I'm proud to be Wet'suwet'en and Gitxan… you know. I'm proud… that's such a proud point for me in my life right now when people ask me where I'm from. (AG, Interview, 2015)

> I feel like we have this inherent connection to where we come from. And I think anywhere, deep down, humans have this relationship with the earth that we can't ignore. We need it! We rely on absolutely everything the earth offers. No other animal or being relies on us. We rely on everything, so that makes us unique. We're kinda the most pitiful, the most Gwe in our language. So… you have to recognize that piece when you're talking about identity. I think people understand themselves more when they understand how they're connected with things in the world. So, when we understand how we're connected to the earth, that makes it a hell of a lot easier to understand who you are. If your people, your laws, your stories, everything comes from that earth as well… it just makes it so much more intense and easier to connect with and grab onto and go! Yeah! That's cultural identity. It's… it's that piece that comes from the land. So, we're lucky enough that our culture comes from right here and we can still have access to it and we still have the ability to go and live it and breathe it and do these things. And if it wasn't for that, I think this… maybe cultural identification wouldn't be as important…. Not as important – wouldn't be as present, that's what I mean! (SG, Interview, 2015)

The lesson to come away with in this theme is mindfulness of the several contributing information points that influence how we think about our identity. The complexity of the personal, social, and legal contexts all coming to an intersecting point is at the heart of the challenge of knowing self and how that self is portrayed to others. This theme intentionally follows the conversation in this work on the salience and fluidity of identity for First Nations to reveal how convoluted the conversation on First Nations identity can

be. What follows next is an additional point of contention around racism or racial macroaggressions when our identities are disclosed.

Theme Three: Internalisation, Pervasiveness of Racism, and Phenotype.

Experiences with racism and discrimination were prevalent to varying degrees in the stories shared by each co-researcher involved in this work. Some co-researchers told stories of items being stolen and destroyed because of their identity and some experienced violence, impactful stereotyping, and generalized racial hate. Others shared their reflections on how they thought of other First Nations based on the beliefs that were pervasive in their lived environments. Some experiences began as childhood occurrences to racial comments throughout the lifespan which were made via micro/macroaggressions. Racial microaggressions, as previously mentioned, are those seemingly minor comments made with either the intention to cause some harm or simply point out a comment based on an individual's race. Whereas macroaggressions are larger in substance and far easier to observe because of their overt nature:

> On the way home from school, there was about six of them, school age girls, ganged up on me and beat me up in the winter. They took that brand-new coat and took turns jumping on it, stomping it into the ground, and one of them ran off with it and buried it somewhere. So, I got back home and of course I was all messed up and my mom was just beyond upset. She called the school and she called the parents of these girls, went to their houses… I mean we all lived in the same neighbourhood and the mothers, I will never forget, standing beside my mom all bleeding and bruised and these mothers looking down at us like we were dirt. "Oh well, my little girl would never do that." And with no exception, all of the parents

> defended their children and said, “They would never do a thing like that and besides, what does a dirty Indian like you need a nice new jacket?” And that was a kick in the head for my mom. My mom dyed her hair a lighter brown because her own hair colour was black and her eyes were black as coal. I can remember even my family when I was born and younger… “What did you trade to get that kid?” and mom said there was rich people who used to come to the bar where she was working and they offered to buy me and they were so shocked that she wouldn’t sell me and they would say, “What’s it to you? You guys give away your kids all the time?” But what they didn’t understand was that if somebody was sick, you would make sure your children were cared for, you would pass them on to an auntie or uncle to raise them for as long as you needed to get well again and not always a permanent thing but always with someone you trusted. (JG, Focus Group, 2016)

Dehumanization is a critical finding in this research. The stories shared in the focus group highlight a very real struggle faced by the co-researchers by non-Indigenous Canadian society. While it is not intended to take away from the valuable and insightful knowledge and experiences shared in the interviews, this is a key finding I hope remains as this dissertation continues through the remainder of this discussion on identity. This dehumanization is key to understanding the dynamic that has existed since the inception of legislation controlling the lives of First Nations. These stories of dehumanization were a struggle for me both as a researcher concerned for the wellbeing of the co-researchers but also as a First Nations woman with a shared identity with the people I was talking to. Dehumanization first came up during the focus group when someone shared the

dehumanizing possibilities that come when all we become is our race to some external observers.

> There is a family member I would interact with very infrequently from the side of the family that I married into. Each time this person was around, their main focus was on my identity. To them, I was the Indian that married into the family and she would display excitement over this in such a way that made me feel small and insignificant. She would bring up any and all news about Indians, talk to me about Indian Sweaters (Cowichan style sweaters) and how she would knit me one if she knew me years ago, and she would tell me the most insulting jokes about my identity. Her justification for behaving this way was because she grew up around Indians and it was okay. I tried speaking up but when I did, it was dismissed or laughed off. It destroyed me to know that I would never be anything but an Indian to her and that I would never have a proper conversation that didn't include my identity being attacked by her microaggressions (Reflexive Journal Entry, no date)

While my experiences with dehumanization or feeling as though I was no more than my cultural identity to an outside observer is not as heart wrenching as the story that is to follow, it is important to note that there is a systemic issue at work that once bred and still to some extent, breeds this way of thinking:

> I used to work in a lodge and my employer used to bring in tourists to meet a real Indian. And sometimes when there were children at the lodge, they would ask me to bring my youngest to play with the children. I would bring my happy little boy

> to play with these children so they wouldn't be lonely. One couple asked if they could take my son with their family because they were going into Lake Louise for the day so their child could have somebody to play with. And when they got back, they didn't want to give him back… I have never been so terrified in my life. They never made the connection of why he was such a beautifully behaved and lovely little boy… it was the most frightening thing in my life. I can't imagine what it was like for our ancestors, there weren't those things to protect us and there weren't the international laws that there are now! There's no way, if I fought it, that they would have actually gotten out of the country with him, but generations back there was nothing to protect us when people did things like that! (LA, Focus Group, 2016).

I spent a lot of time reflecting on this particular story from LA from the perspective of being both an Indigenous woman and mother. The policies that have been in place for over 150 years through the *Indian Act* have imposed a dehumanizing way of thinking about First Nations people. To hear the firsthand account from someone who experienced the devaluing imposition of taking her children away without consideration of the family unit brought me to a place of reflection. Reflection on the event, but also reflection on how this would impact how I thought of myself as a mother who happens to be from a group that so many have marginalized long before my time. The repetitive nature of this racial onslaught also brought me back to my master's thesis wherein I discussed this concept of internalised racism. Internalised racism and/or internalised legislation following a similar process to what Paulo Friere (1970) talked about as the oppressed becoming the oppressor.

This notion of internalised racism was first witnessed during interviews for my master's thesis. Internalising the eligibility criteria as defined within the *Indian Act* and imposing those beliefs on to others when you question their identity, is a real oppressive behaviour that exists and needs to be discussed. When we equate *Indian Act* eligibility criteria with cultural identity or belonging, this is problematic for both the people needing validation and those who feel as though they are forced to validate. This pressure from those with which we would typically identify is known as the oppressed becoming the oppressor. This was first discussed at length by Friere (1996) in his reflections on what happened to a group of people facing oppression together. The internalisation of imposing forces, and the trauma that is carried forward by those who have been oppressed, is alive and well in First Nations identity politics.

> I was 6 years old. 6 or 7 years old getting bullied on the bus because I was not Native enough! … Our culture, identities were stripped off us and trying to come back into that, where we're learning who we are and we're learning how to live and we're learning our culture and like… trying to learn our culture 'cause our knowledge holders are dying so fast. And then… you have this conflict of trying to hash out what that identity means. And… I mean, you almost lose sight! And it's really complicated… just even trying to put that experience into words because it's such an internal racism of sorts that was implemented and forced and like… you know… so yeah. It's such that internal racism happens to almost any culture that's been colonised! You look at you know, people who were slaves that came over from Africa and when black people… African American people started inter-mingling with and intermarrying with non-African American people and you

> look at the mix-breeds and you know… like there's that… and like… you're white but you're also Native… you're black but you're also white… and kind of getting the hate from both sides. And I remember getting that growing up! I remember getting like, another kid who was ¼ Native, like me, being like, "Get off the effing reserve! You don't belong here! Go back to where your people come from!" And I'm like "What does that even mean?" (AG, Interview, 2015)

First Nations identity is a personal journey riddled with complications from politics, social perceptions, and experiences of racism or discrimination. The *Indian Act* itself has become an internal belief system for several communities due to the nature of their lives revolving around systems laid out within the *Act*. Beyond the Indian Act, co-researchers also provides response that ignited conversations about phenotype (ie. appearance and prejudgments based on either not being easily identified or fitting within a socially constructed stereotypical picture of who is or is not First Nations.

It is imperative to acknowledge that identity is not about appearance; however, phenotype is often utilized as an indicator of who someone is based on pre-conceived beliefs of race and appearance. Unfortunately, this information is steeped in deeply seeded stereotypical beliefs. This theme was revealed during a focus group with two women who shared their stories of not looking like what society expected them to be. There is a two-fold struggle prevalent here:

1. Validating your identity to those with whom you share a similar identity, and
2. Validating your identity to others in society holding a preconceived image of what you should look like but to which you do not match.

Feeling as if one should validate their identity is a very real struggle that is not often spoken about. However, an example of the thinking behind the need to validate is summarized by CG here:

> It's really played a role in my identity. I wish that it didn't, I mean… it's… it feels like a crutch or something like that. You know, when I was talking earlier about you know… trying to express to others that First Nations people or status Indian and pulling out the status card and being like, "Yeah… this is who I am!" I wish that I didn't have to do that, but I did. If I didn't have it, it's very possible, considering my light skin that I maybe would have retreated and like… "Oh no… No, I'm not a…" or something like that because there was no supporting evidence. So, it provided something. I definitely went through a period of time where I was very critical of the role that it played, that I saw it as a crutch in other people. Why can't you be something more than that thing? Than that card? So, it was pretty frustrating with that. (CG, Interview, 2015)

Reading stories on validation in the context of disclosing or "measuring" identity may initially appear innocuous or not intentionally harmful to the outside observer. In taking a step back and understanding the granular level of impact for someone requested to (or forced to) prove who they are we acknowledge racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions are small enough to not indicate any harm or damage at the outset and are oftentimes perceived as comments or opinions made with good intentions. Racial microaggressions are best defined as the well-meaning comments (or slights) made by outgroup members that are intended to compliment or recognize something about an individual but also includes commentary on race. An Example of this was provided

earlier in sharing my experience with a woman petting me on the head and calling me an Indian Princess for wearing my Button Blanket at convocation for my Masters degree. I have often heard racial microaggressions explained away as well intentioned, however, the racial undertones are rife with covert racist beliefs. The lasting impacts also remain, as I heard from the co-researchers as they recounted stories from their childhood and more recent experiences. External influences considered, it is then imperative to turn the experience of racism inward for a comprehensive look at the inner workings and pervasiveness of racism.

Theme Four: Identity and health.

> First Nations identity is very oral and it's very ancestral and it's passed down… that identity and where you fit in society as working community within your Nation and that… I guess that would be a healthy First Nations identity!" (BI, Interview, 2015)

Identity and health are not mutually exclusive; there is a hidden link between the two due to the nature of identity struggles faced by First Nations people in Canada. Membership in a marginalized group that is often the target of racism and discrimination does impact health repeatedly and in difference ways. Though the negative is easy to identify, the ultimate goal is to leave the reader with a sense of the resilience that goes hand-in-hand with identity for First Nations people. Contact left a painful history, not to be forgotten, but also a resiliency that is traced back through ancestors. The co-researchers shared this connection that remains despite the repeated attacks on identity and ties within communities.

> You start to build this inner resiliency, but this inner compassion, as well, for the people that may not be on the same healing as you are. I think knowing your identity, knowing your people, knowing their past, looking at their future… it makes me feel empowered. It makes me feel strong knowing that I'm on the right path in my life and that if I can be a role model for some of the kids back home. (AG, Interview, 2016)

Knowing and understanding personal identity is a source of strength and support for First Nations people. Several co-researchers described a shift in gaze from status to cultural identity. Despite the efforts of the *Indian Act* to do away with First Nations people through status eligibility criteria, First Nations people rely on the strength of their family, their ancestors, and their culture to live life as who they truly are.

> I know a lot of people who absolutely don't know where they're from at all, you know… their parents were part of the 60's scoop or they grew up in foster care themselves or… for whatever reason, there's a lot of Indigenous people, I mean in the city, that don't know where they come from and I know that I have to be grateful for, even though I know a little, for what I do know because not everybody has that privilege. And… being Indigenous can be really hard, but at the same time I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world! It's also my source of strength and our way of life… our ways of life have provided me with such love and goodness and all of the things that they're always meant to give in the last few years and have really helped me through really tough times and… if I wasn't Indigenous, I wouldn't have that! (DJ, Interview, 2016).

Cultural identity is health and well-being. It is a piece of personal identity determined by the person and their relations, not dictated by the *Indian Act* or others.

Cultural identity is both an internal process and an external place that surrounds First Nations people. There is a strong link to the land and where ancestors once walked.

> I believe in blood memory and things being passed on through our lineage. Of knowing how to do things, how to harvest, how to speak, how to walk this earth and it's natural for our people to just be who they want to be. To be themselves. That comes through that, we are born into that… that's what I'm trying to say. What that has looked like, let's say for the past six or so years I was in university, is that… I would get that release of coming home and I would engage in cultural identity when I would engage in those things. I can go live my life elsewhere but coming back and engaging in those things, that's just key to well-being. That's key to being able to continue in a healthy way. If I didn't have that… yeah, I wouldn't… definitely not have felt as healthy as I could have been. (SG, Interview, 2015)

Each of the co-researchers shared their journey of cultural identity and seeking out ways in which it works for their life, their family, and ultimately their health. Cultural identity exploration and achievement is the link to focus on when talking about identity and health for First Nations people. Within cultural identity is the resilience of First Nations people and the traditions that go beyond and mean so much more than the development of identity politics determined and held on to by the state.

Summary of Recurring Themes

The recurring themes in this research highlight very real experiences of the co-researchers navigating lived experiences and negotiating not only their thinking about

who they are and what that means, but also how social interactions can sometimes take a toll on their wellbeing.

> "My well-being, I think, comes from being Anishnaabe, comes from having those basic teachings… comes from… you know… all those past experiences. Whether they be positive or negative, but I've actually learned from them and I've applied them, and I've actually talked and shared with other people, with other students, with other children who are going through care or have gone through care, you know? My story is not unlike others, I'm finding, and I think there's a lot of power with my experiences and I think, you know… as I'm growing older and gaining more experience, I'm finding that my story is not… when I was younger I thought, "Awe… I'm the only one going through this! I'm the only one that's experienced this!" But now, as I'm getting older, I'm finding out that no, there's a whole generation, there's a whole group of people that are going through this and we're all finally trying to come to grips with that. As uncomfortable as it is there's also great comfort in my being able to say that I'm Anisnaabe. (RLM, Interview, 2016)

The four main themes throughout the thematic analysis exemplify how broad the experience of identity, social perceptions, and influences on wellbeing really is for First Nations. The order they appear in this section are purposeful in that they begin first with the individual co-researcher thinking about their identity, then moving into social interactions where we hear stories of how others perceive the identity of the co-researchers. The first theme covered findings on salience and fluidity of identity to show the diversity of how identity is disclosed across situations as well the very personal

reflections and ways of thinking about identity. The second theme went slightly below the surface of the identity we disclose externally and looked toward the different inputs that inform how First Nations define their identity. Moving into the third theme I chose to take a closer look at the impacts of external thinking of identity and how ongoing experiences with racism, racial microaggressions, or discrimination, permeates an individual's definition of self through processes of internalization. Finally, the section on themes finishes with a look at identity and how it relates to health in the fourth theme.

Thematic Analysis looking across transcripts of individual interviews and the focus group provided me with the opportunity to seek out similar messaging that essentially made meaning out of the identity experience for the co-researchers I spoke to. Their stories were shared here as much as possible to ensure their voices were privileged and that my interpretation of their intended meaning did not influence the outcome of their sharing of lived experience. The four themes are arranged in this way with the intent to reveal the diversity of experiences had by First Nations when thinking about identity, what identity means, how others perceive their identity, and how that impacts their wellbeing over time. The stories of the co-researchers found within these themes also show the resilience and the strength possessed by the co-researchers in sharing their narratives to hopefully encourage others to talk about their experience and inform those who may be respectfully curious about what it means to be First Nations in Canada in the early part of the 21st century.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Existing identity theory looks to the individual as the sole player in identity development. There are, of course, life stages an individual navigates to know who they are and where they belong. However, no existing identity theory considers the impact of severe marginalization within society alongside government legislation that determines who is or is not eligible to be a member of a specific group.

Each person described their identity in the way they have come to know it in the face of government legislation and societal perception. Each person defined their identity as shaped by their experiences, their history, their family, and sometimes defined it situationally. The political stream of identity development includes the progression through community and federal politics, both of which link back to eligibility criteria established within the *Indian Act*. Eligibility criteria varies among individuals and is the deciding factor of whether the government recognizes a First Nations person as a Status Indian. Status can be present, not present, or even omnipresent for folks depending on the person, their history, and experiences. Examples of when status does matter include instances where identity or belonging is questioned. An example may be when one thinks about what the future may bring in terms of transmitting status to children and whether their children will possess status, as laid out within the *Indian Act*. This was certainly present in the experiences shared by the co-researchers.

Identity is a fluid concept that changes over time and place for an individual. How someone thinks about their identity may not be the same from one day to the next or even from one situation to the next. Information is continuously fed into how an individual places themselves in a specific context and because of that, we may describe

ourselves in a different way each time (ie. how I introduce myself where I grew up is different in depth compared to how I would introduce myself in an entirely new context). These diverse experiences are seen in the transcripts shared in this dissertation and in the reflections I share on both the process and the learnings I experienced as someone on a similar journey to knowing identity with the co-researchers. To highlight the journey of understanding and exploring identity, I prefer to use the direct words from the co-researchers to prevent my interpretation from taking away from their knowledge:

> As a child, I didn't really have much understanding of my cultural identity. It was never at the forefront of who I was and, you know, I was… as a child we moved a lot. It really wasn't until we settled into where we were living when I was in grade 9 that I started getting a sense of community and who was around me and where I was situated in all that. So, it was really in my teen years that I started exploring my cultural identity and what it meant to be Native… um, and, you know, sort of doing that in relation to the Aboriginal population that was living on reserve in the town we were living in and feeling very separate, you know? So, it's a small community. I'm obviously different from a lot of the students and a lot of the families that are there, but I didn't fit with the kids on the reserve and I didn't quite fit with all the white kids. So, you know, I was sort of in this in-between place that I really wasn't comfortable being in at the time… and you know as I matured, as I got to get more comfortable asking questions about my family and talking more to my mom about that and, you know,… it was really coming to school that really sort of… I settled into my identity a lot more comfortably and, you know, I'm able to sort of confidently say that I feel like I'm in that in-

> between place. That you know, I can identify as First Nations, that I know my Canadian heritage is just as important to me, and, you know, … was the foundation of my upbringing in a lot of ways and this exploration I did with my cultural identity as being First Nations is a newer one but it's as equally comfortable. (JG, Interview, _2016)

Shared Experience

The topic of Indigenous identity is complex, convoluted, and different for each person. However, when talking about identity and events in our lives, Indigenous Peoples are often able to draw similarities from the experiences of others. Witnessing the focus group discussion between the two co-researchers drove this finding to the forefront of this work. While I was able to draw similarities in individual interviews with co-researchers, the focus group allowed me to witness, firsthand, the story-sharing between two people who were strangers, mere moments before. Though their lives were otherwise incredibly diverse, sharing their experiences of identity and how society treated them because of their identity built a bridge of understanding and respect for one another. An immense amount of information on how powerful an exchange on identity is when people are in a space where they can safely share is equally important to the content of the stories they share:

> LA: There are times when I think about things like that, when there were people who would deny my Indigenous identity because I don't look very Indigenous… there's dues that we pay when people know that we are even if we don't particularly look it. One of the other things I wonder about, it's very interesting for those of us that don't look Indigenous to find out about our relationship

history because I think that we really do internalise a lot of things, I have a lot of violence towards my person for a very long time. A history of just horrific violence and abuse in my life and I wonder how much of that has to do with internalising and my worth as less than or not as good as or should put up with it.

JG: You just made me have a thought, and that does seem to be a key issue is that we… as Indigenous people, Aboriginal people, or First Nations people, whatever that title is… our identity has always been an issue, like always an issue.

LA: That is not just those of us who are mixed, hey?

JG: Right… but I think for those of us who are mixed it's even more of an issue because we're fighting to be… we don't like sitting on a fence, it's uncomfortable.

LA: We don't want to be seen because then we get hurt.

JG: Well, I got hurt anyway… but it didn't matter and the violence that I've seen has been… that is also a part and parcel of identity. I can't know… I can't think of any Indian people that I know or am related to that have not had personal experience of violence… and I think that violence, however you witness it or are party to it, it also is part of what helps form the direction you go with your identity. (LA & JG, Focus Group, April 2016)

Though experiences of identity and experiences that result from being Indigenous are so diverse, there are stories that bind us. The sharing of stories, though some tragic, was a healing experience for me as the researcher because processing the stories of others was a validation of experiences that I have had or have witnessed others in the midst of.

Difficult and impactful experiences can be mediated when others walk alongside you; this is where we find the resilience among Indigenous Peoples.

Deconstructing the Identity Experience

> "…iIt was a really proud moment for me to be able to stand there and stand up to someone who had such negative stereotypes about First Nations people in Canada and be like… being able to have a civil conversation with this individual. And… you know, it just made me, it made me feel proud that I was able to stand up in an academic setting or in a very Western atmosphere and being able to be like… This is my story and what you're saying to me is not always true and I think that you need to re-evaluate your perspectives about Indigenous People in Canada." (AG, Interview, 2016)

Identity is a large part of human existence that defines who we are, our experiences in life, and how others perceive us. Knowing your identity is just as impactful as others knowing your identity, with the added power to determine your perceptions of yourself, others perceptions of you, and your day-to-day interactions. The struggle is widely known for anyone who has progressed through teen years to young adulthood. People navigate those youthful waters being aware of perceptions of others, while still building perceptions of self. Knowing where you fit and where others believe you fit are not always in-line and can cause dissonance. The overarching goal of this work is to present a different experience of identity that incorporates contributing information pathways that feed into how we know and understand ourselves.

Decolonizing and deconstructing identity is vital to understanding what makes an individual a First Nations person and a member of their community with which they have

familial ties. Furthermore, it is vital to understanding how we have come to define our identities in the 21st century. Prior to contact, the Indigenous population was diverse and rich with large communities cohabitating with advanced trading systems and collective interests. Separate communities typically referred to one another by their Nation names, sovereign Nations with their own laws. Since contact and especially since the inception of the Indian Act, First Nations Identity has undergone several attacks through external definitions, limitations, changes, and eligibility criteria through the Indian Act. For this reason, original ways of explaining identity were taken away and replaced with a Western understanding of what an Indian is, a western construct forced upon the peoples of the land now known as North America. The Western definition of First Nations identity has never reflected the original definitions and ways of knowing ourselves. With the ability to reflect on the mistakes of the 20th century, there are several First Nations communities defining their own eligibility criteria that moves away from *Indian Act* control, such as that found within the Nisga'a Final Agreement. Funding formulas for community support are dependent upon how many individuals in community possess the ability to meet status criteria. Until 1985 it was common for First Nations women and their children to be denied access to their community because they lacked *Status*; until this time status was a dependent upon the men in a woman's life. As an example, a non-First Nations woman would gain status upon marrying a Status First Nations man; any children resulting from the marriage would also possess status. However, First Nations people could and did lose status for various reasons (e.g., through marrying men without status prior to 1985 and not stating the name of a father on birth certificates), which meant their ability to transmit status was also lost. Though some were able to regain the ability to transmit status

through the two attempts (i.e., Bill C-3 and Bill C31) at rectifying the status sections of the *Indian Act*, gender discrimination and discrimination in general remains.

The complexities and unique experiences First Nations people have had with identity, commentary/perceptions on their identity, and the fluid nature of understanding how we come to define ourselves the way we do, only highlights the need for this research. To pin down a singular definition of First Nations identity is best explained as attempting to capture a moving target perceived differently between people and ever changing due to salience at a particular moment. First Nations identity, not well known by those who do not have the lived experience, exists on an ever-changing continuum. First Nations identity is a moving target that is highly influenced by surroundings (geography, people, and situations). Any two individuals will not define their identity in the same way due to the very nature of their lived experiences, the environment they are currently in, and their thought processes around the outcome of disclosing identity information. Identifying oneself is highly situational; the co-researchers highlight spaces as well as different times in their life where identity is (or was) an active thought. A simplified attempt at the parts of identity that can be disclosed by a First Nations person are components or a mixture of culture, spiritual beliefs, and personal, social, and relational definitions. In some cases, these may be accompanied by a legal qualification of *status* within the *Indian Act* (or lack thereof). First Nations identity can be all of these and none at the same time. How do you define something impacted by so many different forces and beliefs all at once?

At the root of this difficulty is the innate quality of identity and internal mechanisms guiding self-thought. Identity is personal, social, and relational. A

psychological perspective will outline a process with stages achieved by a person; it is individual. If you ask a First Nations person, it is your family, your culture, and the community you come from; it is collective. The added complexity for First Nations people comes with Federal Government legislation through the *Indian Act,* with eligibility criteria one must meet to be an "Indian." First, we have an external source taking the power to define an individual. There is no other government with a legal document containing eligibility criteria for a group of people as is found within the *Indian Act* of Canada. Secondly, the *Indian Act* draws out eligibility criteria for being a member of a group; this did not exist prior to contact between First Nations people and Europeans. The word used to describe the culturally diverse and rich people in Canada did not even exist prior to contact. Indians, First Nations, and Aboriginal peoples as terms to denote a group of people, did not exist prior to contact. Naming is inherently important for Indigenous peoples, and for this reason you will notice in this work that several co-researchers refer to themselves as members of specific Nations. This brings to mind the question, what does it mean to be an Indian? Though it is important to note that several people still use the term Indian to define their identity, and this is okay. People have control over how they define their identity and the terminology they prefer. If you are unsure of how someone refers to their identity, it is typically acceptable to ask in a respectful way, how they would like to be identified. Identity is an important part of daily life due to the reason that much of our ability to locate and make connections is based on our names, our families, and our community ties. This information is generally lacking when people are referred to broadly as First Nations, Indigenous, Aboriginal, or even Indians.

Internal Mechanisms

Existing theories depicting the development and progression of identity miss the mark for First Nations people in Canada. There is a wealth of academic thought in the realm of psychology and personhood devoted to identity development; however, it has yet to include the knowledge and the lived experiences shared by the co-researchers in this work. This research uncovered the complexity of identity development and achievement for First Nations people by looking beyond the individual and identifying several impeding influences. The complexity and intersections of competing elements on identity also feed into the holistic health of the person and the community. I heard from co-researchers about the lived experiences of their identities, the journeys they have been on in understanding their identity, and their thoughts on how others perceive their identity. What was uncovered was an incredibly complex web defining identity that is both deeply personal and social at the same time. The personal and social processes involved in identity development are profoundly impacted by intersecting thoughts and behaviours from society and the legal definition of who is and is not First Nations as defined within the *Indian Act*. This complication was common across the experiences of the co-researchers around identity and it is the missing link from mainstream psychological understandings of identity definitions and development.

Secondly, identity and health, are not mutually exclusive but also not typically discussed in the same conversation. Though it is important to note that there is not research or information to suggest that they are exclusive, it is important to note the connection. This research highlights real examples of how identity and health co-exist in the commentary on Frist Nations identity, two things that influence eachother. Identity

can determine the health of an individual and their connection to community. When identity is a contested topic for an individual, it brings into question their thoughts about where they fit which may incite painful thoughts as they witness their in group treated poorly . These challenges to an individuals perceived in group may in fact challenge their thoughts about who they are.

Identity Disclosure

Finally, First Nations identity is fluid and dependent on the lived experience of an individual, the environment or situation an individual is in, the salience of one's identity on a particular day or at a particular moment, and the safety in a particular situation. First Nations identity is a fluid conversation within the individual where some questions may come up when disclosing:

1. Am I safe?
    a. Do I feel comfortable disclosing my identity right now? Will the reception be positive or negative?
2. Where am I?
    - What geographic area am I in right now? What situation am I in?

        a) Should I identify myself?

        b) Do I need to identify myself?
3. Is my identity relevant here?
    a. Will disclosing my identity (if not readily obvious to the other) have an impact on the situation (or not at all)?
4. Who is here?

a. Do people know who I am or where I come from? Will my identity change the interaction?

5. What has happened?
    a. Have I had any experiences recently that would affect how I introduce myself today?

This internal process of questioning around identity disclosure came from the narratives shared by the co-researchers. The above questions come from the co-researchers' interview transcripts in relation to the unique theme of negotiating and navigating the internal discussion on identity. Not every question may come up each time identity arises, and the questions are not exact. However, the significance is that these questions arise at all.

> "I find times when I have to… there are times when I have to think about it though, right? You know, how I identify myself. And this actually just came up for me last week. I'm taking a class right now in university and we're working with small groups and we had to do some introductory stuff and, you know, just sort of based on first appearances, everyone else in my group I would say is not First Nations. So, for me, I instantly get that reaction of… you know, all of a sudden, I'm thinking, "Do I identify myself as First Nations? Do I not? What role is it going to play? What are they going to think about me? What are their assumptions going to be about who I am?" And, you know, like it really weighed heavy on me, sort of, as we were going through that round and I had to reflect on that through some journaling activities afterwards and was able to talk about it a bit more in my journaling that, you know, … I carry these assumptions that

> people are going to have assumptions about me. Right? So then, in doing so, I withhold parts of myself, right? That creates some angst and that angst obviously boiled over into my journaling <laughter> but, you know, at the same time there are times that I'm super comfortable, you know, with who I am and with my identity and feel like I belong… that it promotes my well-being." (TC, Interview, 2015)

This is the unique experience of disclosing identity described above. While identity is a complicated thing to define for most individuals, the added complexity of situation, safety, and relevance arises for First Nations people and determines how much one shares. The idea of identity being an ever-changing thing may be confusing for those who have not experienced the unique scenarios First Nations people face when it comes to determining and disclosing their identity. The unique scenario includes societal perceptions of First Nations people, which can be negative and limit how much information a specific situation calls for. Examples of some questions people may run through when contextualizing the information they disclose about their identity may include:

1. Am I in my home territory or am I in a place where I should provide detail on where I am from?"
2. Is specific local information feeding from one's identity safe to share and whether one feels safe to share the information).

Current identity theory does not address the fluid nature of identities that undergo changes based on situation and people present. These contributing factors help an individual navigate through competing and sometimes disruptive definitions to personal

identity. The line of questioning often brought up by the co-researchers is an internal decision process that informs how one shares (or does not share) their identity. It is important to note that not every person will go through these questions every time they introduce their identity out in the open and if they do, not every question may require answering. These questions simply organize the internal thoughts shared by the co-researchers when appraising situations where they will introduce themselves. We can better understand the process by looking at each question and the information it provides.

Am I safe? The first question that came to the co-researchers was whether a situation was safe for talking about identity. While some mentioned place and space first and foremost, the co-researchers made it clear that a level of safety did have to be present before further information was shared. Typically, the more detailed questions to follow did not occur if someone felt the might be in a situation that did not feel safe.

Where am I? Consider where you are at a particular moment. How would you introduce yourself? This question sets the tone of what is most important to mention about First Nations identity and it determines whether further questions need answered before disclosing identity. Territory is the focus: are you in your home territory or are you a guest/visitor on another First Nation's territory? How I introduce myself and explain my identity in my territory is different from how I would introduce myself while away and on the territory of another First Nation. Below I provide some examples of scenarios where identity may be explicitly stated in different ways:

When introducing self close to or at home: Person is known along with history and relations; there is no need for elaboration. Clarity is only be provided by confirming

familial relations in most scenarios due to the shared community knowledge held by members.

In situations where you are away from your territory but where your First Nations identity is relevant: Name, traditional name, from <<insert your home territory>> and further introductions commence.

In situations where you are away from your territory and identity may not be or is not relevant: Name and some personal information but no depth if it is not needed. However, in this scenario, there are individuals who will still disclose their full identity and place in their community.

Is my identity relevant here?

Before a person introduces their identity to a group of people, they may consider how their identity may influence a specific situation or interaction. Is the interaction happening in a situation that may cause the information to be used in a positive or negative manner? Often co-researchers noted that answers to this question, like the others, might prevent disclosure from happening or limit the information provided regarding one's identity. A person may choose non-disclosure is if the individual feels they may be tokenized as the speaker for all First Nations people in the room. An example of why this can be an issue is when First Nations people are sought out simply through quick consultations or opinions in a room that requires First Nations buy-in on a decision; checking the box often means that a group has successfully included at least one

First Nations voice in a conversation. Risks of falling victim to tokenism can include losing trust from your home community, being overworked and overused as the First Nations voice, and/or being expected to know and answer to everything to do with First Nations people.

Who is here? Knowing who you are talking to and giving some consideration to what an individual might do with information pertaining to your identity came up a few times in the stories shared. The shared history of racism, discrimination, assimilation, and marginalization through colonization is a painful experience that remains and leads individuals to be cautious about who is around them and what people know about their identity. Will the information be welcomed, or will it lead to a negative interaction? Often, the answer to this question is mediated by prior experiences of racial microaggressions or tokenism that are common to the Indigenous experience. Racial microaggressions were those comments intended as compliments but only serve to racialize a person in a negative way. Asking oneself who is here was often linked closely to how relevant identity information would actually be to the people present and to what depth information should be shared. Specific focus on the "who" came out primarily when a situation or space was new or relatively new. As an example, several of the co-researchers noted that they might introduce themselves differently across difference scenarios. TC shared that she "might introduce herself differently in a classroom on the first day" of a new academic program (Interview, January 2015).

What has happened?

This question can address what is happening for an individual at a certain point in time. It is essential to make space for someone to consider any positive or negative contributing factors that may influence how much information they choose to disclose about their identity at any given point in time. At this point in the line of questioning, the person has decided that yes, some information can be shared, but has paused to decide how much will they will share or in what way will they share. Has the person recently experienced a hurtful event that would prevent disclosure of identity? Has the person recently experienced a positive event that would support disclosure of identity information? Negotiating this question involves reflection on previous experiences in similar situations and using that interaction information to determine how to proceed.

Looking to what has happened in the past and present informs this question through reflection on both positive and negative experiences. Answering this question is affirming for personal identity and promotes feelings of belonging, if it is a positive experience. However, negative experiences where one feels bad in a situation can cause further marginalization and possible alienation from their community.

> "I always wanted to distance myself from my culture, so badly. I didn't want to… because I didn't understand what it meant and I always had the negative idea of it" (BI, Interview, 2015).

As mentioned previously, each question may not be necessary, and the complex thought-process involved in navigating identity disclosure is not something that takes as much time as was devoted in the writing of this discussion. However, this does not serve

to devalue the existence of these questions. This is an internal dialogue unique to First Nations people in Canada and is further complicated by community and federal politics.

Limitations

Due to the strong dependence upon consultation and face-to-face interactions during both data collection and member-checking, I decided to keep the research close to home by focusing on First Nations people based within British Columbia. This also worked out for individuals who were already familiar with me as an Indigenous researcher doing this kind of work at the University of Northern BC. The co-researchers were mostly in Prince George, but also across Northern BC and toward the southern portion of the province.

The topic of identity is complex, sensitive, and subjective. Language is a key component to identity and sense of belonging among other cultural markers. In British Columbia, First Nations groups operationalize their membership very differently and possess unique levels of outreach and sense of belonging among their members. This variation in membership is significant because as factors of well-being through identity and belonging, it would be far beyond the reach of this dissertation to measure and account for these variances.

Though there was a general lack of interest in photo-voice indicated by several co-researchers, the interview and focus group transcripts provided a solid base of exploration on First Nations identity experiences and how further inquiry is needed to determine more granular structures that create and maintain identity for First Nations individuals. Reflecting on my decision to include photo voice in the data collection

revealed the need for future research to focus solely on visual representations of First Nations identity as one of the many paths to understanding this lived experience. During the course of this particular research, the stories yielded from interviews and the focus group were rich in content and findings. Photo-voice would have been a valuable addition to the work but with some reflection and at the committee's suggestion, I made the choice to not pursue photo-voice and instead focus on the interviews. Several co-researchers expressed that they felt the interview and follow up was sufficient. I was thankful for their honesty.

Future Directions

When we consider the continual deprivation and unequal treatment of First Nations people in Canadian society, it remains to be investigated whether the experiences around identifying as a First Nations person impacts well-being. However, the stories privileged in this research on identity, how it is shaped over time, and how it changes as attention is drawn to it, highlights the need for further discussion. Through the hierarchy of needs by Maslow (1970), the concept of self-determination discussed by Deci and Ryan (2000), and Burbank's (2011) work on exposure to stress over time for marginalized groups, I believe a link between identity and overall wellbeing can be made. Burbank strikes a personal cord for me, as a First Nations woman working in the field of identity. More recently, I have been examining my own identity, knowing how others perceive it in society. When a person progresses through life experiencing disappointment and frustration in situations where it is apparent that being Indigenous might have been the reason – the association between identity and how an individual

feels about themselves in positive and negative situations strengthen the link I had hoped to interrogate in this research. As an example, Burbank talks about an Aboriginal woman with lifelong difficulties with the non-Aboriginal population. If negative experiences persist and are always with non-Aboriginal people, it may result in a mindset of frustration and anger toward her identity as an Aboriginal person; in other words, she may begin to believe her difficulties arise because of her identity. This is an issue when an "othered" identity is central to how this woman defines her 'self.' If not addressed, her identity (self) might become a threat to her well-being because of the connection being made between these negative feelings and her 'self' (Burbank, 2011). Identities being othered ignites identity salience. When this salience persists through negative interactions and identity remains central to the negative interaction, this can lead to a resulting association.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

> *"Everything we know is subjective. There is no such thing as objective. In other words, in the native world, it's all about subjectivity. In the Western world, we try to remove ourselves. That removal we call objectivity. In reality, the only thing you know is what you experience. There's no such thing as objectivity.* (Littlebear, Personal Communication, 2014)

First Nations people from different communities contributed to this research, mostly in BC but reaching into Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. These individuals are the co-researchers who contributed to this work through sharing their narratives. My intention for the interviews was three-fold: to share experiences in a safe environment, to learn the diverse experiences of the co-researchers, and to identify common themes within the stories shared. The conversation of identity is not an easy undertaking for First Nations individuals: I know this from my personal struggles with identity and it is evident in the stories shared by the co-researchers.

Everything that we know about ourselves and the world is subjective due to seeing ourselves in relation to everything around us and What we know is subjective and we know the world around us because of our lived experiences. The lived experience of identity achievement, exploration, and salience is different for everyone. This research drew attention to the unique experience of First Nations people determining their identity, navigating limiting definitions of their identity (as defined by government bodies), and encountering troubling or painful stereotypes (as perceived about and perpetuated upon them by Canadian society). Paraphrasing Ken Coates (2015), there are few who understand the impacts of negative perceptions towards a group of people based solely on

their identity, especially so when the perception is a “lens distorted by stereotypes” , p. 39). The narratives shared here are not typically versed out in the open where people feel safe to talk about their identity. Oftentimes the level of safety depends on who someone is interacting or exchanging with (ie. possessing a similar or even shared lived-experience). This work is an opportunity to shed light on an experience of identity that is not commonly understood or even given the chance to be explored for various reasons (ie. loss of connection with community, assimilative attempts, restrictions on identity legislation, etc).

The unique experience of First Nations people’s identity development, negotiation, and navigation was an opportunity to employ Indigenous Methodology. The intent was to privilege Indigenous voice as co-researchers. Conducting research that was methodologically aligned with my epistemology and axiology was essential as an Indigenous researcher with an identity experience similar to those of the co-researchers. The knowledge shared in this dissertation brings attention to the discussion we need to be having about diverse First Nations identity experiences. The diversity in experiences with identity is not widely understood or shared by those who possess it or by those who do not but are curious to know what it means to be First Nations. Though no fault is to be placed on anyone because of the lack of understanding and awareness of First Nations people’s identity, this work aimed to inform both those with and without the lived experience of a contested and complex identity. A unique identity experience that is only present in Canada: no other government in the world possesses the ability to determine the identity of a group of people and to control funding and supports based on eligibility criteria that it dictates. In that sense, this work is two-fold: to inform those who do not

know or understand what it is to be First Nations in Canada and to inform identity researchers about a unique identity experience that is subject to copious amounts of information and complexity around relationships.

This dissertation is not intended to provide a clear-cut understanding of the identity experience for all First Nations people, despite the value of the stories and experiences shared here is undeniable. The narratives shared through this work shed light on a conversation about identity that is not widely known, understood, or even accepted. However, this research shows that these experiences exist, they are valid, and they are relevant to a discussion about identity for First Nations people. Journeying through identity exploration in this research alongside the co-researchers has validated my experiences with identity and revealed experiences I did not know existed. Personal and social experiences, the *Indian Act*, and persisting colonial thought and legislation are all contributing factors behind not only how I interpret my identity but also permeate how I express my identity to others. Behind these contributing factors to identity development are the *behind the scenes* influences that guided my reflection on identity: Indigenous Knowledge (Blood Memory and cultural teachings) and Aristotle's Eudaimonia (living to your true self). Each of these contributing factors and influences are unique to the identity experience First Nations people live with each day at varying degrees of salience. I began this work believing Status to be a terrible limitation for identity, that it plagued everyone with similar lived experiences. However, after reflecting on the lessons from the co-researchers, it became apparent towards the end of this part of the journey that status does, in fact, play an important role but a minor one at the same time. While it cannot be ignored, Status exists and does cause some First Nations people to think about their

identity in complex and divisive ways. The findings of this research contribute to further discussions about how First Nations identity exists in a fluid, diverse, and divisive state. It also contributes to the growing focus on resilience and unbreakable ties to ancestors and the land. Blood Memory also has a place in the discussion on First Nations identity, in speaking with each of the co-researchers in this work, I felt the strength of their blood memory. Bonita Lawrence (2004) goes to great lengths to elucidate the importance of Blood Memory and the deep value it holds for First Nations people.

> "The notion of blood memory has deep value in traditional thought, and for many… blood memory has been an important way in which their families keep the faith to an often ambivalent sense of collective identity, despite entire lifetimes spent placeless and almost invisible, in the heart of the dominant culture. (Lawrence, 2004, p. 201)

Blood Memory highlights the persisting and indestructible knowledge that stands the test of time and remains despite assimilative efforts so that the connection to people, lands and cultures does not dissipate.

The stories shared should empower those who do not have a safe space to discuss identity for fear of persecution or devaluation. For non-First Nations people, this work may serve as a window to an experience of identity that is unlike any other in the world. It is my hope that the original intent to decolonize and deconstruct identity has created curiosity. That further work and discussions will flow from these words and encourage movement towards both understanding and acceptance of identity experiences different from what we think we know, what people want us to accept, and what the academy tells us.

Struggling to understand the Indian Act and the impact it has on my identity for the last 15 years has left me with more questions but also hope to continue learning. Status is an identity created to divide,

diminish,

and devalue

the identity that I inherently carry through how I was raised and through my blood memory. Blood memory creates the experiences that lead to knowledge amongst a group of people (Ormiston, 2010). Given to us by our ancestors, Blood Memory is knowledge based on what is beyond our ability to see, do, hear, and experience. This is the lesson I walk away with, this is the lesson the co-researchers have given me, and this is the lesson I leave for my children.

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Appendix 1: Information & Consent Form

Decolonizing and Deconstructing First Nations Status Identity

A PhD Research Project by Jessie King
UNBC PhD Candidate
Information & Consent for PhD Research

What is the Purpose of This Study?

This research project is a degree requirement of the PhD Health Sciences program at UNBC being led by Jessie Capri King. The topic is aimed at defining identity and well-being from a First Nations perspective in order to draw attention to the different definitions found in the Indian Act. The purpose of this research is not only to gather this knowledge but to present it in a way that may have an impact at a policy level in regards to beginning a discussion on the relevance of the Indian Act in the 21st Century.

Individuals with an interest in First Nations identity in light of Indian Act definitions and restrictions on identity are welcome to participate in this research. You have been approached to participate due to another person referring you or because you divulged your interest in participating to the researcher. Your participation in this research will shed light on First Nations perspectives and inform on any links between defining your identity and the impact that ability/inability has on your well-being. Your role will be that of a co-researcher to reflect the level of input you will have over your information. The researcher will guide the process, you will have a say in how your information is interpreted and presented in the final report.

Data collection and analysis will be done through the three formats described below: A) Individual Interviews, B) Focus Groups, and C) Photo-voice.

A) Individual Interviews

Participants (Co-Researchers) will be offered the chance to do an interview on their own with the researcher in an environment of their choosing that is safe and conducive to ensuring confidentiality. Interviews will include the following questions:

1. How would you define your First Nations identity? Is it different from Indian Act legislation on Status eligibility criteria?
2. Does the Indian Act play a role in your identity? If so, explain how it impacts your identity or other components of your life.
3. Is cultural identification important in your life? To your well-being as a person?
4. How does knowing your cultural identity impact your overall well-being? How does knowing who you are and who your People are make you feel?
    a. Can you think of an example where knowing who you are and where you come from made you feel good? Explain.
    b. Can you think of an example where it made you feel bad? Explain.
5. How do you think Society perceives First Nations in Canada? Why do you believe this?

a. Where do you think this perception come from?
b. Can you think of something that supports these feelings?

6. Do you have any further comments on a link between identity and well-being for First Nations?

B) Focus Group

Participants (Co-Researchers) will have the opportunity to take part in a focus group directed at the topic if they so choose. Due to the collective nature of this research, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. This form of data collection will allow participants to hear responses from others and have the opportunity to respond on similar topics in a safe environment. The focus group will be used to gain saturation of data in order for the researcher to observe collective thought on the topic of First Nations identity and well-being. Discussion points will be on the research questions and initial themes arising out of data analysis from individual interviews to gain depth of understanding and to flush out complex topics.

C) Photo-voice

For this portion of the research you will be asked to take pictures that best answer the following questions:

1. Please take photos that best reflect how you envision your traditional First Nations Identity and document any stories to explain the photos and their significance.
2. Please take photos that best reflect how the Government defines your identity and document any stories to explain the photos and their significance,
3. Please take photos that reflect your identity and how it links to your well-being as a First Nations person (Can be combined with Number 1),
4. Please take any other photos that help you to illustrate your identity, well-being, and how you think the Government defines identity and well-being,
5. Please feel free to take other pictures that share your story and provide additional information to the topic of this research.

Each picture should contain a brief summary of the intention behind the photo and the meaning elicited from it. You may do this in long or short form. Additionally, you will be provided with a journal that you may use to reflect on your photo-voice participation or for any use you desire, this is a gift from the researcher and as such you have the right to consent to sharing for data analysis or not. **This is separate from the summary for each photo you will be asked to provide.**

Consent, Anonymity, and Confidentiality

Signing the following consent form indicates that you agree to participate in this research. All materials (transcripts, journals, or photos), will only be in the hands of the researcher, Jessie King, and her supervisor, Dr. Cindy Hardy. Any transcripts from interviews will be accessible to you for the opportunity to make additions or omissions of information before the final report is completed and defended as a thesis. During this time you will also have the opportunity to review any information/data you provide and what information you would like to see in the final report. Your consent will give permission for the information you share to be presented at conferences or in future

publications. Please see the consent section to review the three data collection methods in this research and review what your consent will cover.

Rights of Participants (Co-researchers)

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If at any time during this research project you wish to withdraw for any reason, all information relating to your participation will be removed and destroyed to ensure your privacy. You have the opportunity to withdraw at any time. If any information (including photographs) you share infringes on the privacy a person outside of this research you are free to withdraw that information to protect their privacy. Consent must be obtained if photographs include others outside of the research project. Due to the potential sensitivity of this topic the researcher will be prepared to offer you resources in the Prince George community (or your community) you can access.

Information Storage

All printed confidential research documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Cindy Hardy's lab at UNBC and all electronic research documents will be stored on a password protected computer file. Upon completion of the research you will be given a copy of your transcripts and the resulting thesis. Jessie and her PhD Supervisor Dr. Cindy Hardy will have access to your documents and recordings from interviews which will be destroyed one year after the thesis is complete by deleting the password protected computer file and a thorough shredding of all printed research documents. Consent for any materials that may be used in conference proceedings or publications will be obtained as noted above.

Benefits and/or Risks of Participation

A potential benefit to participating in this research may be to discuss the topic of First Nations identity in light of experience with Indian Act legislation. The subject matter will allow participants to consider their identity in the larger context of legislation and restrictions on Status transmission. The scientific/scholarly community will benefit from a deeper theoretical understanding of First Nations identity and the impacts legislation may have on well-being. This could potentially inform policy makers who wish to know more about how a group of people is impacted when identity becomes externally defined and restricted.

Potential risks to participation may include the personal subject matter of identity and considering identity in light of well-being. Due to the topic being a personal and sometimes private experience, certain emotions may come up while sharing stories on the topic.

How to get a copy of the Research Results

The results of this research will be compiled in a document to be given to the co-researchers at the end of the project and some materials may be used in conference presentations with your consent included in this form.

Questions or Concerns

Should you have any questions during the research please feel free to contact the researcher, Jessie King email: Jessie.king@unbc.ca and phone: 250-960-6061 or her PhD Supervisor, Cindy Hardy email: hardy@unbc.ca. Any complaints about the project should be directed to the Office of Research at UNBC, email: reb@unbc.ca or ph: 250-960-6735.

Consent for Data Collection Methods

Please read through this section carefully. Each data collection method requires consent and is specific to the information you will be sharing. You have the right to consent to any or all of these methods at the same time or at any time during your participation, to your confidentiality in the Individual and Photo-voice components, and to any information you may share with the researcher that may be used in the final product or future conference proceedings.
Please know you have the right to withdraw at any time if you no longer wish to participate in the data contribution opportunities below. This form will be revisited throughout your participation.

A) Individual Interview Data Contribution

Do you wish to participate in an Individual Interview?

Please Circle Yes or No Date:

Do you wish to remain anonymous for the Individual Interview?

Please Circle Yes or No

***Please see Section D to suggest a pseudonym or identifier**

B) Focus Group Data Contribution

Do you wish to participate in a Focus Group? (Anonymity cannot be guaranteed for this portion of data contribution)

Please Circle Yes or No Date:

C) Photo-voice Data Contribution

Do you wish to participate in the photo-voice portion of the research?

Please Circle Yes or No Date:

Do you consent to sharing your pictures and a short summary on the intention behind each picture in data analysis and the final product?

Please Circle Yes or No

Do you wish to share your journal (to be provided) with the Researcher to be used in data analysis and the final product?

Please Circle Yes or No

Do you wish to remain anonymous for the Photo-voice portion of this research?

Please Circle Yes or No

Please see next section on Anonymity to suggest a pseudonym or identifier unless already provided for the Individual Interview.

Anonymity
Please suggest a pseudonym to be used in place of your name

Or

Please provide an identifier to be used in the course of this research
For those participating in the Individual Interview and Photo-voice Data Contribution, the same pseudonym or selected identifier will be used in the analysis and final product.

I_____have read and understand the information sheet and consent to be a part of this research study with Jessie King in the Health Sciences PhD at UNBC on the day of . I also understand that I have the freedom to withdraw at any time during the research and if so all the information I have provided will be destroyed.

Signature of Participant_____Date_____

Signature of Researcher_____Date_____

Please retain a copy of this form for your records. You may review this form with the Researcher throughout your participation. One copy will remain in a locked cabinet in Dr. Cindy Hardy's Lab at UNBC to be maintained by the researcher, Jessie King.

Further Information and Resources

Support Resources	**Contact Information**	
Sarah Hanson, RPN, BA (Psych) *Wellness Centre Manager*	Counselling Services (5-196) 9am-4pm, Monday-Friday 250-960-6369 Email: wellness@unbc.ca	First Nations Centre (7-111) 9am-4pm, Monday-Friday 250-960-5772

Ryan James, M. Ed, RCC CCC *Community Care Centre,* *Centre Director*	**Phone:** 250-960-6457 **Address:** 1310 3rd Avenue (UNBC Downtown BMO Centre) **Days/ Times:** Monday to Friday 12pm – 7pm **Email:** ccc@unbc.ca
Ida Alleman, Coordinator *Prince George Native* *Friendship Centre, Native* *Healing Centre*	**Phone:** (250) 564-4324 **Address:** 1600 3rd Avenue **Email:** nhc@pgnfc.com