

***Walking With Our Sisters: Healing through Storytelling***

by

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of members of the *Walking with Our Sisters* organizing committee before, during, and after the installation came to Sudbury, Ontario in January 2018. The primary research objective was understanding how storytelling allows for a collaborative and holistic approach to the research process.

Through the sharing of Indigenous stories and knowledge, this thesis implicates the researcher as a settler-researcher who was privileged with stories of members of the WWOS organizing committee's journey before, during, and after the installation visited Sudbury in January 2018.

Although each participant's story revealed the uniqueness of everyone's experiences working in the committee, four major themes emerged from the interviews: 1) personal connections to violence against women 2) relationships, self-care & debriefing, 3) arts-based methods as a form of healing and 4) closing the bundle. Presenting the participants' interviews back, through the process of storytelling, revealed the emotional and personal responses to the WWOS installation and created a more collaborative research process than traditional Western approaches, thus shifting the power in the research.

The results of this research will be useful in contributing to decolonial literature and understanding the importance of practicing self-care when approaching the traumatic subject matter associated with MMIWG.

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## **Situating Self: Preparing to Enter the Lodge**

*Situating the installation, and ourselves, in the land of the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek –*

*Honouring the guiding principles of First Nations Peoples of this land*

As a non-Indigenous student settler, visitor and researcher on the land of the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek in the Robinson-Huron treaty and Wahnapiatae First Nation, it is important to me that this research project be guided by principles of the Indigenous Peoples of this land. As a non-Indigenous researcher engaged in Indigenous research, beginning my thesis by situating myself in the research is an integral first step in my journey. Cameron, Plazas, Salas, Bearskin, & Hungler (2014) argue that for a non-Indigenous researcher “an Indigenous methodology allows the researcher to enter into the world alongside Indigenous experience rather than framing the Indigenous world-view from a distance” (as cited in Drawson, Toombs, Mushquash, 2017, p. 13). As a non-Indigenous researcher working with Indigenous Peoples, it is important to build respectful and trusting relationships with Indigenous community members. I need to ensure that Indigenous teachings inform this research project, rather than solely relying on Western research methods and methodologies. Beginning my thesis by situating self provides context for the reader, as well as helps ground my methodology in those teachings that I have been given by Indigenous mentors at the university, community members, and Elders throughout my research journey.

Throughout my thesis, I often reflect on the notion of doing research “in a good way”. This is a concept I have reflected on throughout my journey as a graduate student, and a non-Indigenous researcher working with Indigenous Peoples. By reflecting on the Anishnaabe Seven Grandfather teachings of wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth (Borrows,

2008), I am doing research in a good way. These are the guiding principles I must consistently reflect on to ensure that I am doing research that respects the Peoples of this land and the relationships I have with community members involved with this research project.

My involvement with *Walking With Our Sisters* (WWOS) began with Dr. Joey-Lynn Wabie, who was a member of the organizing committee with WWOS Sudbury. Dr. Wabie had asked me if I would like to participate in the organizing committee through which I helped with responsibilities in aiding with fundraising, social media, and organizing endeavors. Throughout my involvement with the WWOS committee, I was privileged to spend time with Indigenous women in the Sudbury community who demonstrated strength and resiliency in their work with missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. I also was interested in the grassroots nature of the WWOS committee and the ways in which the committee gathered as a collective working together in a non-hierarchical way to attend to the needs of the community and the WWOS bundle.

This research journey is centered around my many experiences as a woman. I believe that until we are all safe in the world, none of us are safe. It is imperative to continue conversations openly and often about violence against women. Thus, this is a personal call, to endeavor towards a world where women will be free from violence. As someone who engages with conversations about the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girl Inquiry on social media, I realize the importance in promoting these conversations in all communities to help contribute to conversations about this national crisis by highlighting the good work being done by Indigenous community members that demonstrates their strength and resiliency.

Another experience that motivated me to pursue working with the WWOS organization was the ways in which women have come together to bring awareness to the issue of MMIWG,

as a result, create spaces of healing for women affected by these issues. Throughout my research journey, I feel privileged to reciprocate a space for members of the WWOS organizing committee to share their stories in this forum. In this way their experiences during their work with the installation will be recorded. As a non-Indigenous researcher, it is important that my work continually endeavors to serve the community I am working with in a good way, continually reflecting on the teachings I have been given by Elders throughout my research journey who have visited my classes and led us in ceremony during the Indigenous Mentorship Network Program. With these teachings, it has been important for me to reflect on the Seven Grandfather teachings throughout my journey: wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility and truth.

As the WWOS installation was celebrated as a ceremony, it was appropriate and respectful to follow the guiding principles of ceremony throughout my research journey. This was incredibly important for me throughout my research journey as I believe it not only respected the vision of the WWOS installation, but also helped ground the research project in a good way by consistently reflecting on the teachings I had learned from those in the WWOS organizing committee.

Just as the WWOS installation had an opening ceremony, I opened my research journey with my thesis committee, friends, family, colleagues, and community by smudging together and offering our intentions for my research journey to be led in a good way by offering tobacco in a sacred fire led by a Firekeeper. Throughout the interviewing process, it was important that I offered tobacco to ask each participant to share their time, knowledge, and stories with me.

As I began to close my research journey, it was important to bring the work I had done back to the community to allow for those who participated in my work to ensure my findings

were reflective of their stories and experience. I provided this opportunity through a community feast that all the members of the WWOS Sudbury organization were invited to. It was important to ensure that the community I was working with felt the work was respectful of the vision of the installation and of their experiences with the organization and the bundle. This began my process of packing up my bundle: taking what I needed from the research bundle and giving back the research to the community.

The final steps to closing my research journey was to present my findings at my thesis defense, where I invited community members to attend. After completing my research journey, it is important to close in a good way with a final smudge and sacred fire. Continued self-reflection after my thesis journey will be important, and I will continue to maintain communication with my thesis committee to ensure that I am reflecting good practices of self-care.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **WWOS Project: Entering the Lodge**

*When we enter the ceremonial lodge, we acknowledge the importance of four traditional medicines of the Ojibwe Peoples of this land – tobacco, cedar, sweetgrass, and sage – we offer tobacco to hold our intentions, we purify the space with cedar, and we smudge with sweetgrass and sage - we ask for these medicines to help guide us through ceremony*

#### **Terminology**

Before discussing my research journey, certain terms need to be clarified. Within the context of my thesis, the term “Indigenous” means: “An inclusive and international term to describe individuals and collectives who consider themselves as being related to and/or having historical continuity with “First Peoples,” whose civilizations in what is now known as Canada” (Allan & Smylie, 2015, p.1).

I also use terminology as described by each Nation’s position used by WWOS, and that is to highlight the impacts of colonialism on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. Therefore, each term describes a different group of Indigenous peoples living in Canada. As my work recounts the experiences and relationships with Indigenous Peoples in the Sudbury area, at times I will also use the term “Anishnaabe” or “Anishnaabe-Kwe (woman)” (Bédard, 2008) to describe the First Nations Peoples of Atikameksheng Anishnawbek and Wahnapiatae First Nation and their identification of self.

#### **A Note on Formatting**

As previously mentioned, this thesis follows the guiding principles of ceremony throughout my research journey; thus, traditional Western thesis titles were often modified to reflect parts of ceremony. Following each chapter title, I included a personal reflection

(formatted in italics) of my understanding of each part of ceremony which helped me to consistently reflect on ceremony and situate myself throughout the research journey. In Chapter 5, I used stories to present back the stories that were shared with me. The bolded paragraphs which follow each of the titles, and close each story, are quotations from the participants. All italicized sentences in Chapter 5 are my personal reflections integrated into the stories to reveal my thoughts throughout the interview process.

### **Understanding the journey of WWOS**

*This project is about these women, paying respect to their lives and existence on this earth. They are not forgotten. They are sisters, mothers, daughters, cousins, aunties, grandmothers, friends and wives. They have been cared for, they have been loved, and they are missing* (Walking With Our Sisters, 2017)

To provide context on the journey that members of the WWOS organizing committee experienced as they brought the installation to the Sudbury community, it is important to provide an overview of the installation process from start to finish. I also believe it is important to describe the entire experience of the organizing committee in bringing the installation to Sudbury as it provides context as to the challenges associated with bringing an event of this nature to fruition, which will be explored in the stories of the individuals I interviewed.

*Walking With Our Sisters* (WWOS) is a commemorative art installation project that honours the lives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada and the United States. In Canada, estimates account for more than 1200 women who have been murdered or have gone missing (Wyld, 2016), but these numbers are not entirely accurate as they fail to account for two-spirited/trans people who were not listed as women by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Ferris, Ladner, Allard, & Hughes, 2018).



*Figure 1 "Hello My Name is: Who Cares"*

WWOS is an entirely crowd-sourced collaborative art exhibit that features over 1763 pairs of moccasin vamps (tops) that were created and donated by individuals within communities across Canada and the United States wishing to draw attention to the violent injustices against Indigenous women and girls. In June 2012, Christi Belcourt, the curator of the installation, put a call out on Facebook for individuals to create moccasin tops for the installation project. With an incredible response from the public, the call was answered by individuals across Canada and they were able to triple their initial goal of collecting 600 vamps (Walking with Our Sisters, 2017).

The exhibit is a floor installation made up of beaded vamps arranged in a path formation in order that viewers can walk through the installation to view all of the vamps (Anderson, 2016; Walking With Our Sisters, 2017). The art installation project visited Sudbury in January 2018.





*Figure 2 Walking with Our Sisters, Calgary, June 2018*

The preparations to bring the installation to Sudbury began a year prior to its visit in Sudbury. The organizing committee was established from members of the Sisters in Spirit committee who wanted to bring the installation to the Sudbury community with the permission from the National WWOS committee. In the beginning there were many discussions, namely: where the appropriate location to house the bundle would be; who would lead the organizing committee; how we would request the guidance and wisdom of the Grandmothers; and how we would raise funds to bring the installation to Sudbury.

There were several reasons why the McEwen School of Architecture was chosen to hold the installation based on its location, accessibility, ability to house a sacred fire outside, and the ability to smudge inside. Also, it is important to acknowledge the transformation of the spaces that house the bundle while it is visiting the community. Christi Belcourt states:

Basically what we do is we take a space, whether it's a community space or a gallery, and all that matters is the community then transforms it into a sacred space, and the ceremony is held for the 10-days-to-3-weeks duration (Sandals, 2014).

Christi notes how spaces are transformed by the community into a sacred space; however, it is important to acknowledge the permanent transformation of the space due to the influence of the vamps being present in that space. In my own personal experience working with the bundle, the McEwen School of Architecture will forever hold a special place in my heart, and I will forever see that space as more than an institutional space because of how the installation transformed me.

There were many installation protocols that needed to be followed from the opening of the installation to the closing ceremony, as outlined by the national WWOS committee, as well as many cultural protocols that needed to be respected in preparation for the installation. These protocols were necessary in continuing the journey of the bundle as it visits each community. Their request also was for the presence of Grandmothers to provide us with their guidance and knowledge about what they believed was best for the Sudbury installation.

As the installation arrived at the end of December but could not be set up at the McEwen School of Architecture until January 4, the bundle needed to be housed with a member of the WWOS committee. This was an immense responsibility as the bundle needed to be feasted and taken care of every day. This is one example of the immense responsibilities that were, at times, emotionally and spiritually challenging for the committee members.

The preparations for the installation took four days, where members of the organizing committee worked together to prepare the space by smudging and laying cedar on the floor, as well as on each wall. They also lay red cloth along the entire floor of the room. The vamps were

smudged and members of the WWOS committee and community carefully laid out them on the floor to help form a path throughout the installation that participants would follow as they navigated their way through the space. This was a very emotional experience for many members of the WWOS committee and community as each reflected on the significance of each vamp as they laid them down.

I was privileged to be a part of the installation process from the beginning. We began to welcome the bundle in a good way through ceremony led by Grandmothers of the WWOS community. Everyone was welcome to attend to help us open the installation to the public through ceremony led by the Grandmothers of the WWOS Committee.

During the ten days that the bundle was in Sudbury, each day began with an opening ceremony and ended with a closing ceremony. Those who were volunteering their time with the bundle were all expected to attend the ceremony. There were always Grandmothers to help guide the visitors and to be available for counsel in a safe space when visitors had emotional responses to the experiences of interacting with the installation, especially the vamps. The installation was open to the public approximately 8 hours per day from January 8<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, we closed the installation with a closing ceremony and helped to pack up the bundle over the next four days before one of the Grandmothers and a committee member drove the bundle to Kenora, where it would be visiting next, continuing the ceremony of the installation. As many of the members of the organizing committee spent most of that time at the installation, it proved to be a very emotionally, physically, spiritually, and mentally draining experience for a lot of them.

As members of the organizing committee, many felt a personal call to assist in bringing the installation to Sudbury, and they dedicated a lot of time and energy to it. I learned in sharing with my thesis committee members that there was often an element of self-care that was missing.

Throughout my research journey, it has been important for me to reflect self-care especially when dealing with difficult subject matter and to ensure that I am taking care of myself and my research bundle through my journey, to ensure that it can be done in a good way from opening to closing. I will be reflecting on my self-reflection in a later section of this thesis.

### **The Installation as Ceremony**

It is important to acknowledge that the WWOS installation is more than just an art installation exhibition – it is celebrated as an Indigenous ceremony. It is thus important that I view the research process as a ceremony as well, from its beginnings to its conclusion, to honour the nature of the sensitive topic of MMIWG, as well as the WWOS movement.

When the WWOS committee first came together, it was essential for the lead members of the organizing committee to first offer the Grandmothers of the community a tobacco tie. Traditionally, sema (tobacco) was given to Indigenous peoples in order that they might communicate with the spirit world: “When we make an offering of tobacco, we communicate our thoughts and feelings through tobacco as we pray for ourselves, our family, our relatives, and others” (Wilson & Restoule, 2010, p. 35). Tobacco was offered to Grandmothers to establish a commitment to working and sharing together. As WWOS was led through ceremony, it was important to give an offering of tobacco to our Grandmothers to request their help and advice with the project to ensure the installation was done in a good way (Wilson & Restoule, 2010, p. 35). Tobacco was also an important part of ceremony throughout the installation as all visitors were encouraged to hold tobacco in their left hand, as it is closest to your heart, and carry it with them throughout the installation, in the lodge, until they offered it back as they exited the ceremony.

The next important part of ceremony that was followed throughout the installation was the process of smudging. Just as tobacco is a sacred plant used for medicine by the Algonquin, Ojibwe, and Cree Nations, sage and sweetgrass are two other medicines traditionally used in ceremony: “The sage or sweetgrass is burned and the smoke used to cleanse a room, people, or objects...This practice is called smudging or purification ceremony” (Lavallée, 2009, p. 28). For the installation to be celebrated as ceremony, it was important that participants smudged before entering the installation lodge, and when exiting. A fourth sacred medicine, cedar, was used on the entire floor of the art installation and under the vamps: “Cedar branches from the tree of life... are used for cleansing and purifying to help us get ready for knowledge” (Young, 2015, p. 55). By placing cedar underneath the vamps and around the room, the Grandmothers were cleansing and purifying the space to ensure it could be received by everyone in a good way.

The installation followed a sacred process so that the lives and spirits of the missing and murdered Indigenous Women and Girls are respected.

## **Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature**

### **Envisioning Grandmother Teachings**

*When we enter into the lodge, we ask the Grandmothers to share their knowledge and stories with us to help situate ourselves in the ceremony – we gain a deeper understanding of the stories and experiences that brought the installation to our community*

The broad questions and inquiries that inform my understanding emerged from the literature I reviewed. It provided me with a deeper understanding of: Canada's colonial systems and oppressions that lead to systematic violence against Indigenous Women and Girls living in Canada; grassroots organizations and how their non-hierarchical, community-based structure led to a culturally relevant approach to healing colonial trauma; Indigenous Women's resiliency and the importance of presenting the work of Indigenous community in a positive way; conducting community-based, community-led research with Indigenous community members; the Canadian federal government's inquiry of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and how the framework of the inquiry failed to meet the needs of community; and, using storytelling as a research method which reflected culturally appropriate ways of sharing and presenting stories with Indigenous community members. These themes are described below.

#### **Violence Against Indigenous Women**

Colonialism in Canada, which sought to suppress Indigenous Peoples living in modern day Canada, has had devastating effects resulting in intergenerational trauma amongst Indigenous Peoples, specifically amongst Indigenous women and girls (Elias, Mignone, Hall, Hong, Hart, Sareen, 2012, p. 1561). To date, there are an estimated 1200 Missing and Murdered

Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) in Canada (Barnsley, 2017). Evaluating this pervasiveness of violence calls for more research to be done into these human rights violations as a means of striving to bring awareness to violence against Indigenous women and girls, as well as their resiliency to human rights struggles.

In 1876, the Indian Act “established patrilineality as the criterion for determining Indian status, including the rights of Indians to participate in band government, have access to band services and programs, and live on the reserves” (Barker, 2008, p. 259). Prior to settler-colonial involvement, many Indigenous communities had proud matrilineal societies, however; through the imposition of Eurocentric worldviews brought to North America through the process of colonization, these societal systems were disrupted and replaced with paternalistic worldviews. The implementation of Canada’s Indian Act redefined the roles and rights of Indigenous Women in Canada by, thus affecting “the relations between Indigenous women and Indigenous men and pushed many Indigenous women to the margins of their own cultures and Canadian society as a whole” (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 8). This colonial legislation was not only erasive of the preexisting relationships amongst Indigenous Peoples, but further marginalized Indigenous Women and Girls, unfairly situating them as targets of violent crimes.

One of the many devastating effects of the implementation of the Indian Act has been the forced displacement of many Indigenous women and girls and, thus, the unfair targeting of Indigenous women and girls as victims of violent crimes. Indigenous females face a disproportionate amount of violence in comparison to other women in Canada:

According to a 1996 Canadian government statistic, Indigenous women between the ages of 25 and 44 with (Indian) status...are five times more likely than other women of the same age to die as the result of violence (Amnesty International, 2004, p.14)

This troubling statistic aids in framing the conversation about MMIWG in a way that centers on the disproportionate violence against Indigenous women as traditionally, “few non-Aboriginal analysts or advocates...acknowledge the specific vulnerability and overexposure of Aboriginal women to sexual exploitation, violence, and murder that has historically, and continues contemporarily, to be a fact of Canadian life” (Culhane, 2003, p. 598). To frame research on missing and murdered Indigenous Women using a decolonial lens, it is important to recognize the unique conditions that Indigenous women face in their struggle against sexual violence and murder. It is also important to highlight how these acts of violence against Indigenous women occur disproportionately in urban areas. Indigenous women have experienced further displacement as the result of the enactment of sexist prejudice in the Indian Act, and as such, “effectively forced off-reserve, many women migrated to urban areas, which contributes greatly to their overrepresentation there” (Senese & Wilson, 2013, p. 220). In order to contextualize violence against Indigenous Women within the context of MMIWG, it is respectful to frame the conversation by acknowledging the displacement of Indigenous Women in Canada as a result of forced displacement by Governmental bodies and how this had led to an overrepresentation of Indigenous Women in urban areas.

As Sherene Razack explains, “when the terrain is sexual violence, racism and sexism intersect in particularly nasty ways to produce profound marginalization” (Razack, 1998, p. 897). It is misguided to approach the subject of MMIWG without recognizing how racism and sexism intersect in this area of violence. It is imperative to examine the inherent colonial violence against Indigenous women when approaching the subject of MMIWG to understand how colonialism continues to perpetuate violence against Indigenous women and, thus, Eurocentric



healing methods may be a hindrance to deep trauma. Indigenous healing methods should thus be prioritized especially for deep intersectional trauma.

Through an exploration of literature on MMIWG, it becomes apparent that the difficulties faced by Indigenous women and girls are caused by a revictimization through systemic failures by provincial and federal Governments to ensure that appropriate policies, and community-based interventions are in place and accessible to Indigenous Peoples to address racialized, gendered and sexualized violence (De Finney, 2016, p. 21). In approaching the subject of the specific gender and racialized violence associated with MMIWG, the most important factor to consider is a framework that addresses the advancement of individual and collective rights for Indigenous women, but also “explicitly addresses gender-specific human rights violations of indigenous women in a way that does not disregard the continued practices and effects of colonialism” (Kuokkanen, 2012, p. 232). Hargreaves argues three contentions for the continuation of this form of colonial violence in Canada:

I have three main contentions: first, that this violence is systemic in nature and colonial in origin; second, that representation matters to the material history of violence and to its resistance by Indigenous peoples and their allies; and third, that Indigenous women writers contribute vital insights into the analysis of gendered colonial violence while envisioning new, non-violent realities (Hargreaves, 2017, p. 1).

In summary, this section of the literature shows that the systemic nature and colonial origin of racist and sexist driven violence against Indigenous Women and Girls exists. The strength and resiliency of women writers highlight their insights of working towards a place where we do not see this form of gendered violence.

## **Indigenous Community-Led, Community-Informed Ways of Healing**

Grassroots movements that are Indigenous-focused, and Indigenous-led typically involve a group of people collectively working together to assert their rights for self-determination and political control: “Political, economic, educational and health benefits and privileges cannot occur when an entire population group is disenfranchised. The potential of individuals cannot be advanced without consideration of historical, social, cultural, economic and political realities” (Coates, Gray, & Hetherington, 2006, p. 383-384). Coates, et al. (2006) emphasize the successes of grassroots organizations in their recognition of the unique cultural realities of Indigenous Peoples and the tools and frameworks that need to be in place for them to heal in a good way, and in their own respective ways. As an organization, WWOS considers the historical, social, cultural, and economic realities of the Peoples they work with to provide safe space for the people of that land and territory where Indigenous Peoples can work together towards a collective and healing goal.

When approaching the subject of violence against Indigenous Women and Girls, it is imperative to consider the importance of relationships, and relationship building for Indigenous Peoples: “Categories such as family, community, and state may carry different meanings and relationships to indigenous peoples than what is implied in standard research or in strategies addressing violence” (Kuokkanen, 2012, p. 238). To approach Indigenous healing methods from a decolonial perspective, it is important to consider how these categories of family and community are at the heart of Indigenous communities and how this recentering of community is an important part of the healing process. By shifting from an individualistic Western perspective of healing and bringing the focus back to the importance of family and community relationships, healing can be brought forward as a relational process.

To broach the conversation of Indigenous ways of healing, it is important to first reflect on how Western ways of healing are often enforced as the sole dominant way of approaching healing. Prizzia and Mokuah (1991) discuss how the assumptions that Eurocentric ways of healing are “predicated on the White-European culture and imply that the values of the dominant culture should characterize the nature and scope of the mental health system” (p. 45). These assumptions are erroneous and fail to recognize the diverse cultural differences of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and their respective approaches to healing: “The immediate implication is that groups who do maintain different and sometimes opposing values and beliefs are excluded and/or penalized in such mental health systems” (Prizzia & Mokuah, 1991, p. 45). As the First Peoples of this land, the traditional healing methods of community need to be understood, respected, and implemented in order for Indigenous Peoples to heal in culturally appropriate way. With this purpose, the four traditional medicines were used throughout the WWOS installation to promote healing in a good way.

Indigenous healing models, such as the ones being used throughout WWOS address how the ongoing processes of colonization have wounded the identity of Indigenous Peoples and how this “needs to be addressed by allowing people to learn about their spiritual and cultural traditions” so that Indigenous Peoples will “pass this healthy behaviour down to the next seven generations” (Lavallee, 2010, p. 279). In relation to WWOS, this organization creates safe spaces that are Indigenous-focused and Indigenous-led, providing culturally relevancy for the Indigenous Peoples of that land and territory to best fit the needs of that community. The community comes together to honour and respect their traditional ways of being, led by the Grandmothers of the WWOS organizing committee. The installation is celebrated as a healing ceremony and, as such, each community brings their own parts of healing into the installation to

help the ceremony unfold in a good way. In relation to the installation in Sudbury, there was a great emphasis put on the importance of smudging when entering and leaving the installation. This reprioritization of culture and healing creates spaces where Indigenous Peoples can relearn, grieve, and communicate about their culture to pass these teachings down to their family in the hopes of promoting healing for the next Seven Generations. The teachings of the Seven Generations provide us with wisdom that we must act in such a way to improve our well-being for the next seven generations into our future.

Canada's systems of healing Indigenous trauma associated with MMIWG fail to acknowledge and utilize Indigenous Peoples ways of healing. By reinforcing colonial ideologies that Eurocentric ways of healing are the only way to heal all peoples of Canada, these systems fail Indigenous Peoples by not offering culturally relevant and supportive frameworks of healing. The failures of not implementing culturally appropriate and relevant ways of healing can be seen in the critiques of the MMIWG Inquiry by many of the victims' families for not providing safe spaces and cultural protocols (Walsh, 2017) which would better serve Indigenous Peoples' needs of ceremony and their culture.

In summary, this section of the literature review highlighted the unique, community-led, community-informed ways in which Indigenous groups can work to heal Indigenous Peoples living with trauma associated with missing and murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in culturally appropriate and respectful ways. Ultimately, systems of healing should serve the needs of the community in the ways that community sees fit.

### **Indigenous Women's Resiliency**

An important perspective that needs to be considered when discussing grassroots organizations and their endeavor to serve Indigenous Peoples living with colonial trauma is the

ways in which Indigenous women continually perpetuate a voice of strength and resiliency. Archuleta (2006) notes that when Indigenous women speak out against oppression and become visible, they “politicize [their] continued existence and signal to...Canada...and other colonized nations that assimilation or continued threats of violence have not worked despite more than five hundred years of trying to erase, ignore, or keep [Indigenous Peoples] silent” (p.92). There is a level of discomfort and unsettling for settler populations in Canada when Indigenous Peoples living in colonized nations signal their continued existence despite all the colonial forces that have tried to eliminate their existence. This resistance is powerful and is an important reflection in my work as it turns away from traditional deficit thinking and situates this research from a position that highlights the strength and resiliency of Indigenous Peoples.

When approaching the subject of MMIWG, it is important to recognize that Indigenous women continue to resist colonial systems. Kuokkanen’s article highlights the importance of Indigenous women creating decolonial systems of resistance:

Indigenous women and their organizations have criticized mainstream approaches to violence against women for being too restricted or for not taking indigenous peoples' realities and specific circumstances into account. (Kuokkanen, 2012, p. 238).

This perspective is an important one as it respectfully considers how Indigenous women resist colonial systems and approaches to healing violence against women.

As Leanne Simpson expresses, “[Indigenous Peoples’] processes—be they political, spiritual, education or healing—required a higher degree of presence than modern colonial existence” (2011, p. 92-93). Simpson’s contribution to this field of literature is important to consider as it reveals how Indigenous Peoples’ processes are often undervalued but highlights how these processes require a higher level of thinking and conform to a more holistic worldview

that encompasses emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental components of health, thus demonstrating that Indigenous Peoples' processes are done in a good way.

Indigenous Peoples have consistently been subjected to assimilation processes, perpetuated through colonial worldviews, however; Indigenous Peoples are determined “to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system” (Davis, 2016, p. 27). Indigenous Peoples have overcome a myriad of colonial strategies but remain a strong, resilient people who will continue on the next seven generations and beyond.

I believe that exploring the subject of Indigenous Peoples' resistance and resiliency in relation to the focus of the research is an important one as it contributes to an optimistic attitude in this field of research that demonstrates the strength and resiliency of Indigenous Peoples and the positive outcomes that can result from Indigenous Peoples working together towards a collective goal that serves Indigenous Peoples living with trauma associated with MMIWG. I also believe that using a framework that respects Indigenous ceremony and protocols reflects their right to practice ceremony and to engage with the community in a culturally appropriate way.

In summary, this section of the literature is important in guiding future research as it highlights the importance in shifting from deficit thinking about Indigenous Peoples and moving towards representations of Indigenous Peoples that highlight their strength and resiliency in facing colonial violence.

## **Community-led, Community-Based Research**

An important point when discussing the research approach with Indigenous Peoples is ensuring that the research is led by community and based in community (Ball & Janyst, 2008). This research project began out of previously established relationships with members of the WWOS Sudbury committee. By building on the preexisting relationships that I have built over the last year with members of community, I was able to establish trusting and meaningful relationships with the individuals with whom I was sharing, which undoubtedly helped to make my research journey successful.

As Castleden, Morgan, and Lamb (2012) point out about community-based participatory research involving Indigenous peoples, the importance of relationship building before and during the research journey: “Spending time in Indigenous communities engaging in conversation with members of the community and actively listening to and respecting the ideas of Indigenous knowledge-holders is essential to establishing relationships based on mutual trust” (p. 168). By centering research with Indigenous community members based on relationships of mutual trust and reciprocity, researchers can ensure that they are respecting cultural ways of sharing knowledge. It is important to consistently sit down with the community members and attentively listen to their needs and concerns about research, specifically in relation to research that involves challenging or traumatic subject matter, such as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Trust is an integral part of doing research with community in a good way: relationships are at the heart of what good community-led research is about (Weber-Pillwax, 2001). I was incredibly fortunate to have been a member of the WWOS Sudbury committee for approximately 6 months, working with community preparing, fundraising, and organizing the installation being

brought to Sudbury. During that time, however, I was able to build relationships by sitting down and working alongside members of the committee. These relationships were built with community members by actively listening to the Grandmothers of the committee and being attentive to the privilege I had to share in these conversations. By building strong relationships built on trust, I was then able to reconnect with these women and ask them if they would share their stories with me.

Honouring reciprocity is an important part of community-based research as it allows for both community and the researcher to gain from the research journey (Kovach, 2010). The researcher must consistently reflect on what the research project has to offer community, and whether it is in alignment with what the community wants (Chilisa, 2012). In relation to this research project, I wanted to ensure that the participants' sharing with me was a beneficial experience for them, and that the final shared product was reflective of what they wanted from the research project. Sharing is a part of the healing process, thus by creating a space where participants were able to express their feelings about their experiences working with WWOS, they could have an opportunity to share and heal. Also, as a settler researcher in the field of Indigenous health research, it was important to constantly reflect on these teachings throughout the research journey, to ensure that the research journey with Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, as well as WWOS was done in a good way.

In summary, this section of the research highlights the importance of settler researchers, like me, working with community in research endeavors to ensure that research is being done in respectful ways that puts the concerns of the community first, consulting with community throughout the research process, and reporting back to community in culturally appropriate and



respectful ways. This section of the literature review is especially important as I work to contribute to decolonial literature from an allied researcher's perspectives.

### **Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Inquiry**

On September 1, 2016, the MMIW inquiry was officially launched as a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's commitment to investigating the systemic problems of violence against Indigenous Women and Girls living in Canada (Moeke-Pickering, Cote-Meek, Pegoraro, 2018, p.57). The framework for the inquiry was to meet with community members in locations across Canada to hear testimonials from community members about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in their lives in order that the government can work towards finding solutions to colonially perpetuated racism and violence against Indigenous Women and Girls.

The MMIW Inquiry has been met with many criticisms from members of Indigenous communities across Canada. Criticisms lie in the ways in which the inquiry is framed and how it failed to account for the culturally appropriate ways community wished to communicate their information and have information communicated back to them: "Though traditional ceremonies precede the testimonies, there have been calls for a mandate that relies more heavily on Indigenous protocols and laws rather than formal public testimonies" (Walsh, 2017, p. 8). When working with Indigenous communities, it is important to reflect upon Indigenous protocols of the territory you are in, as well as culturally appropriate ways of sharing and communicating information. The inquiry's method of asking family members of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls to provide public testimonies about the violence that the women in their lives had suffered failed to acknowledge the importance of using traditional medicines and protocols to share from the heart that respects culturally appropriate ways of sharing information

together. The inquiry fails to accommodate for the ways in which family members of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls wished to share their traumatic stories, and how these public testimonies should be framed to accommodate these concerns.

Another criticism of the inquiry is how information is communicated to family members: “The formalised nature of the proceedings has also been denounced for creating communication barriers for families’ who report being confused by the legal jargon used by the Commissioners” (Walsh, 2017, p. 8). As the inquiry used legal jargon and is conducted in a formal, Western way, it fails to accurately and effectively communicate information to community members. It is important when working with community to ensure that information and data is being effectively communicated in a way in which all peoples who need to be aware of this information, will understand. Hargreaves (2017) argues that the official forms of action that the Canadian government used to address the crisis only further perpetuates colonial power dynamics: “The disappearances of Indigenous women in Canada continue to be met with official forms of inaction or, just as problematically, with government-sponsored initiatives that arguably re-embed colonial relations of power” (p.1).

For the inquiry to better serve the community members it is working with, it is important these concerns are taken into consideration and the federal government endeavors to better serve community in more culturally appropriate ways. In contrast, the WWOS installation is celebrated through ceremony, inviting people from all walks of life to come and listen, share, grieve, heal and support community members.

While Canada, as a nation, draws its attention to the ongoing injustices of the MMIWG inquiry, it is imperative to explore the subject of MMIWG using a decolonial framework to allow for the voices and worldviews of Indigenous Peoples of Canada to be respected and heard. As

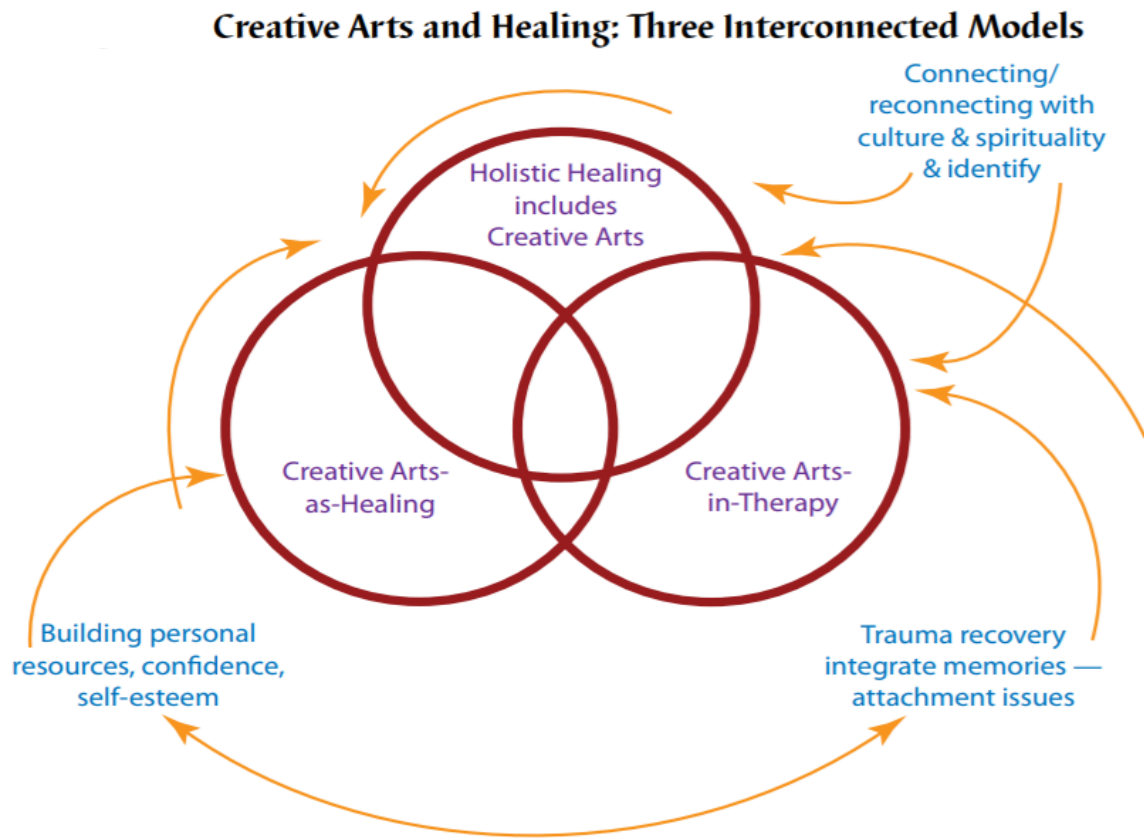
Canada's Governmental bodies work towards supporting the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it is important to have the voices of Indigenous Peoples guide the conversations regarding MMIWG. The work of grassroots organizations, such as WWOS, help enhance Indigenous People's advocacy by allowing their work to be guided by Indigenous worldviews and a collective of Peoples working together to achieve a common goal.

In summary, understanding the contextual significance of the MMIWG Inquiry surrounding missing and murdered Indigenous Women and Girls further demonstrates the need for research that highlights the importance of culturally appropriate healing methods that are grounded in community, and are cognizant of communicating information back to community in culturally respectful ways.

### **Arts-Based Interventions**

As previously mentioned, the MMIWG Inquiry surrounding missing and murdered Indigenous Women and Girls fails to acknowledge the need for culturally appropriate healing methods grounded in community. To approach wellness with an Indigenous Worldview reflects an understanding that if we focus too much on the mental, emotional, physical, or spiritual, we lack wholeness in all aspects (Dapice, 2006). Thus, in an Indigenous worldview, it is important to consider the interrelatedness of creative arts, culture, and traditional healing (Archibald, & Dewar, 2011) and how these interrelated models promote mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical wellbeing. The creative expression of the handmade vamps in the WWOS installation allows for a holistic approach to healing that promotes rediscovering elements of Indigenous culture, which promotes holistic healing (Blodgett, et al., 2013). The figure below highlights the

interconnectedness between creative arts and healing and its ability to aid in trauma recovery and reconnecting culture and spirituality.



*Figure 3 Creative Arts & Healing*

In relation to the WWOS installation, Figure 3 highlights the interconnectedness of creative arts and healing, thus revealing the importance of integrating culturally appropriate art forms into conversations surrounding MMIWG as a means of promoting holistic healing, re/connecting identity with culture and spirituality. The use of arts-based methods in the WWOS installation reflects an understanding of the importance of using cultural ways to help communicate traumatic subject matter (Blodgett, et al., 2013) in relation to MMIWG, thus strengthening a decolonial perspective to healing trauma.

## **Storytelling**

To approach Indigenous research in a respectful way, it is important that I consistently reflect on the teachings I have received from Elders throughout my research journey. As the title of this chapter suggests, the teachings I received from the Grandmothers I spoke with are an important guiding force in how I structured my thesis. When I spoke with one of the Grandmothers about the research project and how research has been done with Indigenous communities in the past, she shared with me that the Ojibwe Peoples of this area have always been storytellers, and that it is important to sit with community, listen, and share together. Reflecting on this teaching, I realized the importance of presenting the research project back to community in a culturally appropriate way: through storytelling.

As previously discussed, relationship-building is an important part of the research process when conducting research with Indigenous Peoples. Using storytelling as a method in the research process “provides opportunities to express the experiences of Indigenous Peoples...and nurtures relationships and the sharing of Indigenous knowledges and cultures” (Iseke, 2013, p. 559). By taking the time to reflect on each story, as well as write back about the experience, the researcher can become more immersed in the research to further develop a relationship with the participant.

Furthermore, storytelling creates a more collaborative process than traditional Western approaches as it shifts the power in the research. Russell Bishop (1999) discusses the process of collaborative storying as a research method that shifts the power in the dynamic between the researcher and participant by promoting “a means of knowing that avoids distance and separation and promotes commitment and engagement” (Bishop, p. 4). By immersing myself in the research by creating narrative reflections of the experiences I had with the participants, I was able to

avoid distancing myself from the research and respectfully consider how best to convey the personal experiences of each individual that I sat down with. Through this collaborative approach to the research project, I ensured what was collected was respected as shared work with community by bringing the work back to community to ensure that the storytelling accurately reflected the thoughts, expressions, and stories that were shared with me.

Traditional Western ways of collecting and analyzing data fail to account for the uniqueness and individuality of each story. Collaborative storying “uncovers the many experiences and 'voice' of the participants, emphasising complexities rather than commonalities,” allowing for the researcher to focus on the uniqueness and complexity of each interview rather than traditional approaches, which see research as “synthesising and simplifying, seeking to distil the essence, or kernels of truth” (Bishop, 1999, p. 4). Implementing a storytelling method to present the findings of this research, I was able to try to convey the unique voice of each participant so the reader could understand and appreciate each individual not as a research participant, but as a unique individual who had their own personal experiences that needed to be shared.

By focusing on storytelling as my method of sharing the stories that were shared with me, I can present, more clearly, each individual’s truth and meaning: “Different stories give different versions of and approaches to truth and meaning. Stories allow the diversities of truth and meaning to be heard, rather than just one dominant version” (Bishop, 1999, p. 5). Rather than attempting to correlate all the stories that were shared into one narrative, storytelling reflects an appreciation of each individual’s lived experience and journey with the WWOS bundle, to more clearly reflect what I heard from community members.

In conclusion, understanding the importance of storytelling in research, in relation to this project, is important as it reiterates the importance of conducting work with community that represents the many truths and meanings of each individual's experience of being a member of the WWOS Sudbury committee, and brings attention to conducting research which values storytelling.

## **Summary**

In summary, this literature review revealed how the federal government's MMIW inquiry failed to effectively work with community members in culturally relevant and appropriate ways. By not providing safe spaces centered around community and traditional ways of healing, family members were not given respect and consideration. Grassroots organizations, such as WWOS provide an opportunity for community members to listen, share, grieve, and heal together.

This literature on combining arts-based research methods for Indigenous research is continually being developed but is limited. The literature that was available provided an important reflection on using culturally appropriate ways of establishing relationships with community, collaborating with community, and presenting information back to community.

The lack of literature on culturally relevant approaches to healing Indigenous trauma linked to MMIW is due to, in part at least to the newness of the Inquiry and research in the field. This literature provides decolonial insight about community-based, community-led research, however.

## **Chapter 3: Indigenous Research Methodology as a Journey: Carrying my Tobacco**

*As we walk through the installation, we carry tobacco in our left hand to hold our intentions  
close to our hearts – our intentions frame and guide our journey*

### **Research As Ceremony**

The theoretical framework used in this research project was an Indigenous research methodology that is rooted in ceremony of the Peoples of this land and territory, the land of the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek in the Robinson-Huron treaty and Wahnapiatae First Nation. Approaching the research journey using a decolonizing perspective is important to write back (Smith, 2012) against the historical layers of colonization and marginalization of Indigenous Peoples inherent in research (Kovach, 2010, p. 42). Thus, to conduct work with Indigenous Peoples in a good way: “Mutually beneficial and open, spirited dialogue that is critically reflective, and respectful, of each other’s practice [is] necessary for growth” (Kovach, 2015, p. 60). To approach the research journey reflecting on the necessity for growth in our academic institutions, as well as creating respectful relationships between researchers and community, the research methodology I used reflected on the teachings I was given by community, and what community thinks is the best approach for this community-based research.





*Figure 4: "Art as Research As Ceremony"*

Indigenous ceremony is the theoretical framework for the research project. It is important, when completing research with Indigenous communities to reflect on what best fits the needs of the community. Ceremony thus helped to guide this research journey from start to finish. Through my participation with WWOS, I observed how every gathering was opened with a smudge and a prayer and ended with a closing prayer. The installation itself was a ceremony led through entering into a lodge, smudging, praying, and offering tobacco. These important parts of regional Indigenous ceremony were integrated into my framework to ensure that everything was being done in a good way and that it was reflective of the needs of the WWOS community.

Tracy Bear, a professor at The University of Alberta and member of the national committee for WWOS, comments on how WWOS can be a catalyst for change in respect to how we evaluate ceremony in relation to academic research. Bear evaluates how an, "Indigenous

theoretical framework founded in ceremony [is] a site for re-centering, reprioritizing, and reorganizing [her] own research from an Indigenous perspective” (Bear, 2014, p. 223). As a non-Indigenous researcher conducting research with Indigenous community members, it was important that I employed a framework that was founded in ceremony and reflected on the teachings that were shared by Elders I had worked with, to ensure that the research project was reflective of my participants. As Saini (2013, p. 6) states, “The involvement of Aboriginal peoples in the creation of knowledge about Aboriginal peoples is critical given the longstanding misuse, abuse and mistreatment of Aboriginal peoples.” Conducting research with Indigenous Peoples means consulting with Indigenous Peoples on what information should be shared, and how it should be shared to work towards more reciprocal and collaborative research relationships.

By writing my thesis from a collaborative storytelling perspective, I was able to enhance the chances that the information and “real power lies with those who design the tools” (Smith, 2012, p. 38). By using ceremony as my theoretical framework, I was able to speak to the power and knowledges of the community I worked with, and I was privileged to have their knowledge and stories to guide the research journey. This meant that some of the ideas about community engagement unfolded throughout the research journey, and the community members I worked with influenced how I wrote my finished product.

As a part of continuing on the path to decolonizing research, it was important for me to adapt a framework that adheres to truth and reconciliation and contributes to literature that builds capacity for understanding and mutual respect (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015). This meant that I consistently reflected on respecting the values and teachings from Indigenous community members and Elders I have worked with when implementing my design, methods,

and analysis of the information gathered throughout my journey. Reflecting on cultural protocols of this territory, it was important that I offered tobacco to the individuals who shared their stories with me and brought my information back to the community throughout the research process to ensure it accurately reflected what the participants and WWOS organizing committee wanted.

By framing this research project as ceremony, I was able to more consciously reflect on the choices I was making and to ensure that what I was doing with the community was in alignment with what it wanted. This framing of my theoretical framework also helped with my self-reflection throughout the research journey to ensure a better balance of the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects so that my research was done in a good way.

## **Chapter 4: Research Design & Methods**

### **Walking With Our Sisters Through the Lodge**

*...when we enter into the lodge, we each navigate our own path that we feel we are called to follow. While we walk through the installation, we gather knowledge from the installation, the vamps, those whom we walk through the installation – we add these experiences and stories to our own bundles*

#### **Research Design**

The intent of this research was to explore the experience of members of the WWOS organizing committee and how they endeavored to bring the Grandmothers' visioning of the installation to Sudbury. The hope is that this work will contribute to decolonial literature to better inform Western institutions about the importance of Indigenous ways of sharing knowledge.

Partnerships between the community and the researcher ensure “that topics under investigation are identified as priorities by Indigenous people, reinforce Indigenous values, are informed by Indigenous frames of reference, and yield benefits to Indigenous individuals and groups” (Ball & Janyst, 2008, p. 48). As a visitor to this Indigenous community, it is important that the research design be done in a “manner that cultivates the golden rule of collaborative, community-based research: Respect, Relevance, Relationship, and Reciprocity” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 38). These four principles of community-based research helped to guide the research design. This research utilized qualitative methods to respect the individual stories and experiences of the people who shared with me.

Indigenous research is founded on establishing respectful and reciprocal relationships with Indigenous community members to ensure that research is being done in a good way. As a non-Indigenous researcher conducting work with Indigenous Peoples, it is important to conduct

community-led, community-based research that is built on preexisting relationships with community to ensure that there are trusting relationships between myself and the participants, and that power dynamics are avoided. Translating the interviews into narratives allowed me to demonstrate thoughtful reflection of each individual's lived experiences. As a researcher, this collaborative approach helped me to ensure that I was immersing myself in the research (Vannini & Gladue, 2009, p. 681) and with the community members I was working with.

Traditional Western approaches to qualitative research methods highlight the importance of maintaining unbiased relationships with research participants. In contrast, Indigenous research methods make it imperative that research relationships is built on trust and reciprocity. To honor Indigenous research methods, and the relationships I have with members of the WWOS committee, it was imperative that I presented the research using a method that demonstrated a collaborative approach to the research process. I also valued and respected the views of the participants by consulting with them about the narratives I had created to ensure that they accurately reflected their thoughts and that they felt comfortable with the information that I was sharing in my thesis. Maintaining these relationships after I complete this thesis will be an important component of continuing to value the time of the individuals and the relationships I have established through this research journey.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

I recruited participants through access to a publicly available e-mail communications list for the members of the WWOS Sudbury committee. After sending my recruitment e-mail to the 24 members of the committee, six members responded that they were interested in participating. Of the 6 participants, 4 identified as Indigenous Peoples, and 2 were non-Indigenous Peoples.

Participation was based on being a member of the organizing committee that helped with organizing, fundraising, and implementation of the installation in Sudbury, Ontario.

I initiated the recruitment process by creating a “Letter of Information/Consent” (see Appendix A) and distributing my “Recruitment E-Mail” (see Appendix B). Once a potential participant responded via e-mail, I responded to them individually. I explained the research, and when they agreed to participate, I scheduled an interview that worked with their schedule.

## **Data Collection**

Six face-to-face interviews were conducted in person in September and October 2018, using semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix “C”). The interviews were conducted at a location of the participant’s choosing. All but one of the interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 30-90 minutes in length. As per one participant’s request, their interview was not audio recorded as we met at a restaurant and the background noise was too loud for recording. The length of each interview was dependent on how much the participant wanted to share about their experiences with WWOS. Respecting Indigenous protocols, each interview began with an offering of a tobacco to the participant to honour their sharing of knowledge with me. By beginning each interview with an offering of tobacco and using a methodological approach that allowed for participants to share their stories with me, this helped me respect and honour the perspectives of participants and facilitate respectful reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples within the frames of the research (Wright, Wahoush, Ballantyne, Gabel, & Jack, 2016, p. 2238).

After each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were stripped of all identifiers so that the participants could remain anonymous. All of the participants provided me with pseudonyms of their choosing that were used in the short stories to

ensure that their stories remained anonymous. All audio-recordings will be erased once my thesis is successfully defended.

I reviewed the transcriptions twice for accuracy. I then sent them back to each respective participant, along with their copy of the short story I had created from the interviews for review. All of the participants responded that they felt the story was representational of their interview and approved of the story created.

## **Consent**

Informed prior consent was obtained from each participant before I began each of the individual interviews. The topic of the research project, methods, and requirements of participants were explained before the participants signed the consent form (see “Appendix A – Informed Consent”). Participants were made aware that their participation in the research project was strictly voluntary and that they had the option to withdraw their consent at any time through the research project. Along with asking for consent to participate in the research project, participants also consented to being audio recorded.

## **Ethics**

The research project was submitted to Laurentian University Research Ethics Board (REB) for approval in June 2018, with the request for an expedited review. An important component was respecting cultural protocols throughout the research journey. I regularly consulted with my thesis committee on the appropriate ways to approach community and how to respect the knowledges of the participants being shared with me.

## **Data Analysis: Reflecting on the Stories & Experiences with *Walking With Our Sisters***

*When we leave the installation, it is important that we take time to consult with a Grandmother to reflect on what we've just experienced throughout the ceremony*

Traditional Western approaches to data analysis fail to account for, and to recognize, the uniqueness and importance of Indigenous People's individual stories and life experiences. By situating the thesis in a decolonial context, the reader understood the impact of colonization on MMIWG. After transcribing my interviews, I imported the transcriptions into NVIVO software to begin the process of coding the interviews. As I began to code the interviews, however, I realized that by coding the interviews and by collating the data, I was losing the heart and spirit of each individual's stories that they had graciously shared with me through the process. I began to reflect on how I could write and present my findings in a way that respected the time the individuals shared with me, and value of each of their journeys. After exploring different methods of presenting qualitative information, I chose to present my findings as stories to provide context and voice to the participants (Kovach, 2010), ensuring that each story reveals the unique character of each individual and their personal journey with WWOS. Robina Thomas (2005) highlights how "storytelling has a holistic nature that provides a means for sharing remembrances that evoke the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental" (as cited in Kovach, 2010, p. 44). It is respectful of the teachings of WWOS to reflect and share the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental components of the stories that were shared with me through the interview process and to reflect them back through storytelling.

This process unfolded by reflecting on each of my interviews with members of WWOS, writing a short story about their experiences leading up to their participation in the installation, during the installation, and after the installation left. Through this reflective process, I was able



to provide context and voice to each individual story to ensure that I was consistently, and respectfully, considering their experiences and the time they shared with me.

Margaret Kovach notes that “to make meaning,” of the stories shared through the research process the stories, “each condensed story was followed by a reflective narrative by the researcher indicating key teachings received from the conversations and stories” (Kovach, 2010, p. 44). Following the narrative writing phase, I wrote a reflective narrative to relate my own experiences being involved with WWOS and to reflect on the teachings and knowledges that were shared with me through the interview process, and how it helped me to grow as a researcher.

### **Honouring Voices**

When conducting research with community, it is important to bring the work back throughout the research process to ensure that the research being conducted is reflective of what the community is saying, and what the community wants from the research. When I had finished writing my first draft of each of the participant’s stories, I sent them back to each respective participants along with the transcription of their interview, to ensure that the narrative I had constructed was reflective of what they shared with me. After verifying and gaining approval from the participants, I was able to move forward in my research journey.

## **Chapter 5: Results**

### **Stories from Walking With Our Sisters**

In this chapter, the stories and knowledge that were shared with me by members of the Sudbury WWOS committee will be presented in six narrative stories that are reflections of my interviews, using the pseudonyms provided by the participants themselves.

Choosing a social practice like storytelling is a way for people to come together towards a common understanding (Simpson, 2013). The process of writing the stories required me to re-story the interviews into a new story. I asked each participant to review their story to ensure that it was a respectful representation of what they expressed in their interview, and thus to ensure that the re-storying presented a common understanding of the interviews.

As a settler-researcher, it was important that I recognize my positionality as a non-Indigenous person retelling the stories of Indigenous women. Sium & Ritskes (2013) highlight the importance of recognizing that *who* does the storytelling “remains an important question in decolonization work” (p. 4). It’s important that I reflect on my tenuous position as a settler-researcher retelling the stories of Indigenous women. Consistent and thoughtful reflection on my positionality throughout writing the stories helped me to approach storytelling with respectful intentions.

## **Grandmother's Story**

I sit down with Grandmother in a restaurant. We order ourselves something hot to drink as it's a chilly evening. I begin by reintroducing myself and where I come from, explaining this research project, and my intention with this research. I present a tobacco tie and offer it to Grandmother asking her to share her stories with me today and ask for teachings as I continue on my journey. It's loud in the restaurant where we're sitting, so I'm unable to record our conversation. I get out my pad of paper and prepare to listen attentively to what Grandmother is sharing with me today.

Grandmother was the ceremonial lead for the Walking with Our Sisters Sudbury committee as chosen by the curator of Walking with Our Sisters, Christi Belcourt. This meant that she led us through ceremony and guided us with her visions about how we should prepare for the installation and what it might look like. She tells me that one of her first responsibilities was to help find other Grandmothers who would help offer their guidance and support throughout our preparations and during the installation. Grandmothers were an important part of "ensuring the bundle was taken care of in a good way". Grandmother provided teachings to members of the Walking with Our Sisters committee to help everyone interact with the bundle in a good way so we could honour the lives and spirits of the women, girls, and children.

Grandmother tells me about the vision of the 8-pointed star which informed the design of the installation at the McEwen School of Architecture. She tells me it was one of the Grandmother's husband who had the vision of the star. The design of the star was designed to represent that everything that you send out is brought back to the center. She provides teachings for me on the importance of honoring Seven Grandfather Teachings in the design of the installation. The children's vamps were in the middle of the star to represent how our children

are the center of each community. I'm very fortunate to hear these teachings about the installation as it helps bring together all the stories I have heard from other members of the Walking with Our Sisters committee.

After the vision of the 8-pointed star had been brought forward, Grandmother tells me about her experiences working with the architecture students to bring the installation to fruition. She says it was a great experience for her in working with students and established great relationships with the students who created the pieces and design for the installation.



*Figure 5 "8-Pointed Star, Sudbury, Ontario, WWOS Installation, January 2018"*

Grandmother tells me about how the process of bringing the installation to Sudbury and having this experience open to the public helped to bring people together and open a lot of doors for non-Indigenous Peoples to explore Indigenous culture and ceremony in a respectful way, while also commemorating the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada and the United States. This tells me the importance of having community bringing this

together and how we must always strive to work together to work towards a place free from violence against Indigenous Peoples.

Grandmother tells me an important part of this installation is providing a safe space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples to come together and grieve for the lives of Indigenous Peoples who have been lost to violence. She tells me how respectful visitors were in understanding that this is our history and how we must give our time to help people who were going through a hard time during their visit with the installation.

An important teaching Grandmother gives me is the importance of understanding the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in the context of Canada. She tells me that “We’re all family; we’re a human family”. She says that we need to take care of our families the best that we can. We need to do this by caring for everyone as family by showing love and compassion. As Grandmother is telling me this, I think about other members of the committee I have spoken to how we must recognize the crisis of systemic violence against Indigenous women and Girls as a Canadian problem that we all are complacent in.

I’m particularly drawn to the last conversation we have: what was the experience like for Grandmother when the bundle left? As I knew, from my conversation with Blue Sparkling Water Woman, they both travelled together to bring the bundle to Kenora. I ask for guidance from Grandmother about why I continued to have dreams about women and girls going missing or being murdered after the installation had left. I’m incredibly happy I asked this question as Grandmother tells me the importance of closing in a good way. She tells me that when we had the closing ceremony, many people were rushing the ceremony and one of the Elders was unable to send away the spirits in a good way, so the spirits were waiting. She tells me how people were sick after the installation had left because we had not closed the bundle in a good way together.

This is important for me to reflect on in relation to the other stories that I will describe below from other members of the Sudbury committee. Members of the committee will share with me that when the installation closed that they didn't feel it had closed in a good way and were still left with a lot of emotions after the bundle had left. *We need to make sure that we are taking time for ourselves and our self-care to ensure the bundle is also being take care of in a good way.*

Grandmother and I close the conversation and she tells me that it was “an awesome learning experience” for her and she was incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to be a part of the bundle's journey. She tells me that her next steps moving forward will be that she will go to the final closing of the installation. I thank Grandmother for her time and her teachings today. As I leave the restaurant, I think about how these teachings were such an important part in this phase of this research journey.

### **What a beautiful community we have in Sudbury**

## **Mary's Story**

**This is a this is like a Canadian family problem. It's a family problem. It's not just our problem, it's not just your problem, it's a Canadian family problem**

It's a warm, sunny, fall day as I walk to go meet with Mary. As I'm walking to meet her, I think about this time last year: meeting with the Walking With Our Sisters Sudbury committee for the first time, and meeting Mary for the first time. Back then, I had just moved to Sudbury and had barely met anyone other than my colleagues at the university. I remember tentatively entering into the room of the Friendship Centre, feeling welcomed as many new faces greeted me. Although I would never describe myself as being shy, I was apprehensive as I entered a room full of strangers. It's ironic to think about "new faces" as I walk into Mary's office building: I've made such close connections with these women in the last year that I would hardly call any one of them a stranger.

I sit down in an office space with Mary. She is welcoming and friendly, providing me with a comfortable chair to sit in as I anxiously prepare for my first interview. I tell her this and she gives me a kind smile that is reassuring to me. She offers me a cup of coffee; no milk or sugar, so we drink our coffee black.

I meticulously organize my set up of my recorder, note pad, and pens and breathe a deep breath before we sit down to chat. The anxiousness I feel is not because I am nervous to chat with Mary but because of the reopening of the topic with my fellow committee members. I haven't sat down to talk with a member of the Walking With Our Sisters committee since it closed in January. I offer tobacco to Mary to share her stories with me today, and we begin.

Our conversation begins with establishing an understanding about how she became involved with the Walking With Our Sisters committee. In my experience working with the committee, Mary was always very involved and willing to help wherever she felt her talents could be used in a good way. When she found out about members of the community wanting to bring the installation to Sudbury, she knew that she wanted to volunteer her time to help make it happen. Mary's roles and responsibilities throughout the organization of bringing the bundle to Sudbury were very different than my role of supporting social media and fundraising efforts, so I am captivated by hearing her perspective on the challenges and obstacles that the committee faced throughout the organization process.

For those who have never been a part of a Walking With Our Sisters committee, the host committee follows guidelines provided by the National Committee, led by curator Christi Belcourt. Mary describes that to follow the direction of the Grandmothers and the National Committee, there are occasional disagreements such as where the installation would be held and what that would look like. We discuss the challenges of working in a committee and how this can often impact the relationships amongst individuals working together. From Mary's perspective, she simply wants to follow the direction of the Grandmothers, particularly the vision of the Grandmother who is the ceremonial lead of the installation: "They tell me what their vision is, and I worked to implement it, and that's how it went" she very honestly tells me. This is an important part of the organization of the committee: we listen and respect the teachings we receive from our Grandmothers and bring them to the installation to do everything in a good way. At the heart of the installation are the good intentions from those who are volunteering their time to bring the bundle to our community.



When approaching the subject of Walking with Our Sisters, I was interested in exploring how members of the Sudbury committee thought that the experience of bringing the bundle to Sudbury aided the community. Mary discusses the importance of the bundle in relation to the crisis in Canada of Indigenous Women and Girls being murdered or going missing: “Indigenous Peoples and our women have been disappearing for 30-40 [years]... Um, nobody cares. We’re discarded like trash”. These sentiments are commonly heard when listening to individuals who share their feelings on the MMIWG crisis in Canada, but it doesn’t make it any easier to hear. These words are sharp and direct, but they need to be heard.

As I slowly become more comfortable talking with Mary, our conversation begins to flow more smoothly, and we begin to get at the heart of our discussion. As someone who felt a personal call to want to volunteer their time to bring the Walking with Our Sisters bundle to Sudbury, I ask Mary what brought her to help the bundle:

I’ve experienced violence and many of Indigenous women that I know experience violence and I am dedicated to ending violence against Indigenous women and I do whatever I can to spread the message and to do my part and... to make that a real thing that we achieve in my lifetime.

As Mary speaks, I recognize the privilege I have as a non-Indigenous woman hearing her speak about her personal battles with violence as an Indigenous woman. Mary’s allowing me to hear her personal experiences with violence brings a renewed sense of reality and prevalence of the colonial violence inherent in Canada. Despite her own experiences with violence, Mary is dedicated to doing what she feels she can to help spread messages of ending violence against Indigenous Women and Girls, and to create real change in her lifetime. To enact this kind of change, Mary speaks to her commitment of bringing the installation to Sudbury to help non-

Indigenous Peoples and youth in the community become more succinctly aware of the MMIWG crisis in Canada:

Bringing my work and our work as a committee...so that community members can come and they can pray and they can have the healing and they can feel the energy and they can...create that space...to be involved with my fellow committee members to bring that to be in this community is one of the most amazing things I've ever done in all of my life.

I sit and listen to Mary share her stories about her commitment to working with the committee in bringing the installation to Sudbury to allow people to heal and have the space to feel what they need to feel. I am struck by this and will think about it when I leave: *How do we create these spaces to allow for healing? What do we need to do to support each other in our journeys to healing trauma?*

Speaking with Mary about the nature of the bundle reiterates an important theme in our discussion: Art is Ceremony. Mary and I discuss the nature of the installation: how each vamp was handmade to represent a Missing or Murdered Indigenous Woman or Girl, that we smudge and enter the ceremonial lodge with the vamps, how everyone from every walk of life can enter into this space and have the opportunity to learn, grow and heal:

It's like magic. It brings all those barriers down, those you and me stuff and me against you stuff... that stuff really dissolve[s] and we're just human beings together experiencing this stuff together.

Like Mary says, it is like magic. The nature of the bundle and sharing the installation through ceremony allows us all to come together and experience art as ceremony: we are all welcome, we can all feel and experience what we need to feel, we are human beings

experiencing this bundle together as a whole community. This is the heart of the installation. This is what makes Walking with Our Sisters so special.

Mary concludes our chat by sharing how blessed she feels to have been a part of the Walking with Our Sisters Sudbury community and to have helped bring it to fruition for the community. As I finish my conversation with Mary, I thank her for sharing her time with me and allowing me to hear her intimate and personal connection with the bundle and her experience working with the Sudbury committee.

I leave the building and see the sun is still shining. I take a deep breath and walk home thinking about what Mary's shared with me. The importance of providing spaces for healing is sticking with me. How does work with Walking with Our Sisters provide spaces for healing for all people?...

**I think it's important especially when it's something so close to me this way that I take responsibility as a community member and do my part and I'm very, very blessed that creation brought that to me**

## **Marie's Story**

**It's just kept me mindful of we're all connected and we're all neighbours. We're all part of this community and there's something we can all learn from one another or each other**

It's a cold, wet, morning as I walk to meet Marie. I'm looking forward to seeing her again, as Marie has always been a positive light throughout our work together with Walking with Our Sisters. I have been so fortunate to have Marie continue to support me through the research journey by encouraging me through attending my proposal defense and agreeing to sit and chat with me today.

We sit down in a small room and we both chuckle as we can hear the laughter (and screaming) of children running around the library. We both settle into the small space catching up since we saw each other last spring. As we prepare for the interview, I offer Marie tobacco to share her stories with me. She holds the tobacco tightly in her left hand and we begin.

My conversation with Marie unfolds very quickly, getting to the heart of how and why she came to be a member of the Sudbury Walking with Our Sisters committee. Marie became involved through an open invitation, by a professor at Laurentian University, to attend a meeting at the Friendship Centre with other interested volunteers. Shortly after this meeting, Marie shared with me a very powerful and emotional dream she had:

Near that time I had a dream and in that dream...I was in a, a prayer circle with a sacred fire, and it was a grandmother and a grandfather there and I wasn't really sure what to do (Indigenous culture is not my culture). In the dream... I ended up sitting at the foot of an elderly man on the ground...I was flipping through a

poetry book. And, I found this poem really touched me and as I'm sitting on the floor, on the ground, there was, I sensed, a group of a women just filling the whole space of the prayer circle. I was asked to speak and to say a prayer. I didn't really understand what that meant other than praying for my children, my family, my friends, and for anybody else. And at the time I tried to find that poem to read and I couldn't find it in the poetry book, but I offered my prayers and the man that was sitting behind me, the elderly man, embraced me from behind with tears just falling down his face. And I just-I even had the sensation, I remember the sensation of his tears. And he said, "Yes please, please pray for my mother and my daughter and my aunt" ... after [I] came from that dream I felt I didn't know what I was getting into, but I thought this is something I need to explore.

There is a silence in the room after Marie tells this story. She is very choked up telling me her dream about being asked to pray for daughters, mothers, sisters, aunts, and friends. I can see that this is something that Marie still thinks about, and still needs to talk about and share with others to fully understand the meaning of this vision. She tells me that this experience, for her, felt like an important calling to be a part of the committee. Marie explains how this feeling was further solidified when she had recounted this dream to another member of the committee only to discover that someone else had shared a similar dream. Marie shares the powerful connection she felt in visioning the Elders asking for prayers, and to share that vision with someone else felt like, what she referred to as, synchronicity.

I think about the connections that we have with each other in the committee, and how important speaking from your heart and sharing those experiences are in the process of growing

and healing together. *How can spending time together, sharing these personal experiences with the bundle, bring us to a place of healing?*

Like an earlier discussion with a member of the committee, Marie also speaks to the challenges of working with a committee of individuals and the obstacles that can take place when you're working as a larger group. She talks about how there were a lot of miscommunications and minor disagreements within the committee and how she grounded herself in the work she was doing, and the people around her:

I chose to always remind myself that we were there to honor and memorialize the women that have been missing, that they were our focus...that was my focus anyway. So whatever bumps we came across along the way, the real focus was for the women that we were representing, those vamps.

This reflection from Marie really speaks to me. It is often challenging to navigate the spaces of a group dynamic, especially when working through traumatic subject matter, however; Marie emphasizes the importance in re-centering ourselves in our work to think more clearly and succinctly about what ultimate reason brought us all together here: the vamps. Although we all came from different spaces, places, and walks of life, we are all here to honor the lives of the women and girls who have been lost, and to memorialize them.

This meditation from Marie is something I carry through this research journey: *Why am I doing the work I'm doing? Am I always keeping myself mindful of doing my work in a good way?*

Marie identifies herself as a non-Indigenous woman and, as such, discusses the importance of her role within the committee as a support to the other volunteers in their fundraising endeavors. One of the primary fundraising initiatives for Walking with Our Sisters in which both Marie and I participated was decorating mugs that were sold with tea to raise money

for the installation. Marie talked about her experiences sitting with volunteers and community members who came to help decorate and prepare the mugs:

I participated as much as I could in fundraising activities and being in those spaces during the installation. I was there to hold space, I had a lot of conversations and held a lot of space. Being able to with women while they're painting [mugs], a lot of conversations came up around language, childhood experiences, and community, and there was some very interesting, very personal conversations with strangers.

As Marie says this, I think about my own involvement working with decorating and preparing the mugs we made for sale. At the beginning of the process, we were all quite excited about making the “Kokomis Tea” mugs and tea we were selling. As we received more and more orders, it began to get quite overwhelming to fulfill all the orders, so we began to host sessions where anyone was invited to come sit and help with the mugs. These sessions slowly became visiting sessions where we would sit, chat, and drink tea. I'm touched by what Marie says: These experiences were very close, personal connections amongst members of the Walking with Our Sisters and strangers. Thinking back, it's important to reflect on how those sessions were an opportunity for us to hold space and allow people to come and share with us in a safe space. *How do I hold space for women in the community who need spaces to feel and share their thoughts? What is my role as a non-Indigenous woman in these spaces? How can I be the best ally I can be when I'm doing the work I'm doing?*

Marie's stories speak to me because of how she situates herself as a member of Walking with Our Sister in supporting her sisters by spending time with them, listening to how they are feeling. In holding space for other members of the committee to share what they need to share, Marie is offering her gift of listening and sharing with the committee to help things progress in a

good way. Marie shares with me the nature of these conversations she had with other women in the committee and the admiration and appreciation she has for the women she worked with:

I just marvel at how a community of women come together and they talk about violence against women and yes, there's a lot of emotion involved, but there's a strength and a power and a resilience there that just blows my mind and I really take comfort in in that, for myself.

Listening to Marie speak, I can tell that this is at the heart of what's important about this work to Marie: Supporting a community of women to help each other demonstrate the strength, power, and resiliency that they have in addressing violence against women. As Marie describes it, she is impressed by the members of the community who come together to bring the installation to Sudbury to allow for people to learn and heal together. Marie closes our conversation by, once again, expressing how grateful she is to have been a part of the community and how the experience strengthened her commitment to learning more about Indigenous culture, language, and ways of being in this territory.

We conclude the interview and I express my thanks for allowing me to hear her stories today. She gives me a warm smile and says she looks forward to hearing back from me about how my journey is going. Walking home after speaking with Marie, I think about how the conversations with members of the Walking with Our Sisters Sudbury committee are filling my mind with beautiful, personal stories from all these individuals about what brought them to be a part of the installation, what their experiences were like with members of the committee and larger community, and how they have been feeling since the bundle left.



Seeing the emotion in Marie's eyes today makes me think about how we must take care of ourselves when we are giving ourselves and our time to the bundle. *How do we value and respect self-care when holding space for other people?*

**It's very powerful to be part of, so rather than just letting it go and having it go on its way, and then never think about it again... I don't know if that's possible...**

## **Blue Sparkling Water Woman's Story**

**Murdered and missing women and children is a really important issue, so I was interested in doing whatever I could to bring awareness and to bring people together and build relationships**

It's a warm, sunny, autumn morning as I race to catch the city bus to head downtown to meet Blue Sparkling Water Woman. I'm looking forward to speaking with her as I did not work closely with her throughout the preparations of the installation. I walk up the stairs to meet her in a big open room; she greets me with a warm smile and directs me to where she has set up chairs for us to sit.

Blue Sparkling Water Woman prepares a smudge for both of us, so we can begin our discussion in a good way. I think about cleansing as we smudge:

*As I bring the smudge to my mouth, I think about speaking truthfully and respectfully.*

*As I bring the smudge to my ears, I think about listening reflectively to what Blue*

*Sparkling Water Woman is sharing with me.*

*As I bring the smudge to my heart, I think about being thoughtful and compassionate to*

*Blue Sparkling Water Woman during our visit.*

Blue Sparkling Water Woman has a very special and personal connection with the bundle as the bundle lived with her while it was waiting to be unpacked and installed at the McEwen School of Architecture. The bundle contains all of the vamps that are part of the installation and, as such, has a lot of emotions and spirits attached to it, she tells me. I knew that she had an

immense commitment in housing the bundle over the holidays, but she begins to tell me about the preparations she needed to do for herself and for the bundle to keep it in her home in a good way:

I kept the bundle at my home for a month, prior before its installation. I cared for the bundle every day. I had to smudge the bundle, pray for the bundle and I had a Grandmother who helped me care for that bundle while it was at my house through the holiday. It took over my living room...I put up a little Christmas tree for the bundle because I felt presence of those children and my children too, so we put up a tree. We did our best to take care of the bundle in a good way. We feasted the bundle when it got there. We sang and drummed.

Throughout the month that the bundle lived with Blue Sparkling Water Woman, she received many teachings from the Grandmother who was the ceremonial lead of the Sudbury committee who helped strengthen her knowledge about understanding about the bundle, how to care for the bundle, and how to care for herself. The bundle, as she tells me, came to her to help her family heal in the way they needed to heal:

I felt really humbled and I was really hoping that that bundle would change things in the house...calm my children...which it did. It was a lot of learning, trying not to leave that bundle alone...it was lots. The Grandmother helped me a lot. She gave me lots of teachings. I got more comfortable with it. But I was really nervous when it came because I just felt maybe my home's not good enough... I just felt like they could have picked any other person on the committee to keep the bundle and a Grandmother just gave my name and I said, "I might have room" and she said, "Okay, it's staying at her house".

Blue Sparkling Water Woman discusses how she felt a sense of unease when she first thought about housing and caring for the bundle, but as she learned from the Grandmother she was spending time with, she became more comfortable and confident in caring for her family and the bundle. Although she felt initially as though it was a responsibility that she was not confident in taking, she was able to learn from her Elders and feel comfortable with the responsibility and teachings she had been given.

Blue Sparkling Water Woman describes her experiences being present with the bundle throughout the installation when visitors came to enter the ceremonial lodge:

I found that it helped to build relationships and take away fear of Native culture and smudging...a lot of people have never done that before and they were a bit reluctant or didn't know if they should, or how, and we taught them in kindness and gentleness and showed them what we do and then you could tell that they got more comfortable as we talked to them... then they had to take their tobacco, and keep their tears and put them in the basket...so we had to explain you know how everything's sacred and it seemed they became more comfortable as soon as they crossed that opening [of the lodge] where we were smudging everyone.

Blue Sparkling Water Woman's words are an important reflection in our current time of acknowledging the processes of Truth and Reconciliation in Canada. As a non-Indigenous Person who participates with community in ceremony, I think back to when I first smudged and offered tobacco and felt an internal unsettling with an unfamiliar cultural protocol. But just as I learned from the Elders who taught me the significance in what I was doing, and felt welcomed to participate with community, Blue Sparkling Water Woman highlights how welcoming the members of Walking with Our Sisters Sudbury were in receiving everyone from all walks of life

to enter into ceremony together and have the space to feel what they needed to feel during their time with vamps. Creating open spaces where both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples can come together to commemorate the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, we are all contributing to acknowledging the truth of the devastating effects of colonialism in Canada to work towards a place of reconciliation. Spending time walking with the vamps in the installation provides a truthful representation of colonialism in Canada: “When you’re walking beside those vamps you make a connection, “there’s a pair of vamps” ... there’s a person missing...It’s more tangible...you get more of a connection with it, I think”.

Just as in my discussions with Mary and Marie about the challenges of working with a group to bring the bundle to Sudbury, Blue Sparkling Water Woman expands on her experiences working with the Sudbury committee. Blue Sparkling Water Woman spent more time with the Grandmother who was the ceremonial lead for the Sudbury committee and speaks more to how she felt the members were experiencing the installation together: “Everybody had to work together, so you could see that people were happy to be there, although they were emotional”. This is a positive reflection from Blue Sparkling Water Woman, which is not surprising as she is an incredibly warm and friendly woman. I’m happy she shares this with me because it provides me with a new perspective to consider about how the Sudbury committee worked together. It’s easy to think back about the closing of the installation and the negativity and exhaustion that was in the air, but it’s also important to reflect on the good moments: us being happy to work together to be there and bring the bundle here. As she says, we all felt very emotionally drained from the exhaustion of being present every day and feeling the weight and presence of the spirits present in the bundle. It’s also important that I take time during these chats to listen to how

positive the experience was for many people, though, and how happy most of the moments were together.

When the installation had closed, Blue Sparkling Water Woman, along with a Grandmother and one other individual, was responsible for helping to bring the bundle to its next location. She tells me about the long journey to Kenora, Ontario and their difficulties along the way. She shares with me a difficult story about the Grandmother facing racism in Thunder Bay along their journey. I can see the hurt in her eyes in telling me that this was part of her experience in closing the installation. She reassures me that when they finally got to Kenora, they were greeted by members of their community with warmth and love. I ask her about what it felt like to finally let go of the bundle after being with it for almost a month. She pauses and tells me it was very emotional, “it felt like you were letting go of a piece of yourself, almost”. We both pause and I think we are both reflecting on what it felt like to finally say goodbye to the bundle in our own ways and pass it along to the next community.

As we prepare to close our conversation, I ask her if she has any last words to share. It’s in these last reflections in my conversations with members of the Sudbury committee that I have been able to see how we are all linked to the bundle and how that affected our perception of us working together to bring the bundle here:

**It’s important that we accept everyone because we’re all spirit living in physical spirit  
like we’re all, we’re all one**

## **EP's Story**

**I just wondered how that experience, and how that bundle, change the people who were  
part of that experience**

I'm happy to be sitting down with EP today to discuss Walking with Our Sisters as we had worked together several times throughout the preparation, and during, the installation. As non-Indigenous women, we were primarily there to support the work of the committee. We worked together preparing the Kokomis Tea & Mug fundraiser and helped in the kitchen during the installation by serving food and helping with clean-up. EP situates herself as someone who was on the outside, helping to support wherever she could, but gave space to the Indigenous women in the committee to have the conversations and discussions they needed to have together. As we begin our conversation, I offer EP a tobacco tie. She says Miigwetch and we begin.

As we begin our conversation, EP tells me about how she saw her role as a member of Walking with Our Sisters Sudbury. She tells me that as she is not an Anishnaabe woman, and that she deliberately established herself as someone who could help support and contribute where she felt comfortable but did not want to take up space by offering her advice or suggestions:

As a non-Indigenous woman, I thought that I didn't have any role at all, frankly, in the committee... but really it was my own interest to see if, um, if there was anything that I could contribute.

As she very clearly tells me, EP was not a part of any decision-making throughout the installation, so instead we talk about her own experiences she is comfortable sharing with me. (I want to respect how EP situates herself and want to use this narrative as an opportunity to highlight the parts of our conversation that focus on understanding and acknowledging the

privilege of being a non-Indigenous woman living in Canada and not being able to understand the lived experiences of Indigenous women living in Canada who face systemic racial violence.

EP tells me about how she perceived the installation as an opportunity for non-Indigenous community members to come together and understand more succinctly understand the troubling crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls:

I think it made what we hear about, what we read about, what we know about, more real.

There was an area set aside for the Grandmothers to talk with anyone who felt moved to weep, or to talk to, to confide.

As EP describes, the role of the Grandmothers was a very important one throughout the installation in providing comfort for those who experienced emotional responses to the bundle. I reflect on what EP is saying and think about how different the experience of walking through the installation is than the traditional ways that we are communicated information about the MMIWG crisis in Canada. Most of the information we receive about the systemic racism in Canada is conveyed to us through traditional media sources, books, lectures, and videos. By having an interactive experience with vamps that were carefully, thoughtfully, and deliberately made to represent the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and children, there is a different emotional response. *How can ceremony be research? How can research be art? How can art be ceremony?*

EP shares a story with me about an experience she had after the installation left that is an important reflection for me, as a non-Indigenous researcher doing work with Indigenous communities, about being aware of our privilege and understanding that being a part of Walking with Our Sisters, and writing these stories will never provide me with an understanding of what



it is like to be an Indigenous Woman living in Canada who, regardless of social, economic, or political status, face systemic racism:

I was at an event yesterday and [someone]... very briefly talked about some... good practices for people who are planning to do any research with Indigenous communities...and one of the things she said was, “Don't come to our communities and say we're all equal, because we're not”... I'm paraphrasing what she said here, but the point of what she said was that she said “I can be a professor, but when I walk down the street, I'm still an Indigenous woman and I still deal with violence and we are never going to be equal,” ...those of us who are non-Indigenous are never going to experience”

This is an important reflection that I must always recognize when I am writing these stories and conducting this work. I'm grateful for this conversation to re-center my stories at this stage of my writing.

As we close our conversation, I reflect most on what EP says about how blind and ignorant Canada is to the systemic racism and colonial violence that is continually perpetuated.  
*How can research be presented in a way that makes people aware of this issue?*

**It's really just kind of stunning to imagine and realize how deliberately blind most of Canada is and, continues to be in lots of ways... so I think a book, a film, an interview, an article in the Globe and Mail, a poster, there's all kinds of ways that we become aware of what the issue is but I just found that the installation was a lived thing**

## **Carmen's Story**

It's a cold afternoon as I walk to meet Carmen to chat with her, but as soon as she greets me, I instantly feel warm and happy to see her. I'm very excited to see Carmen again as I haven't seen her since the installation closed. Carmen spent a lot of her time at the installation throughout its visit in Sudbury, and I was very fortunate to spend some of that time with her. As we prepare to start our conversation, I offer Carmen tobacco to ask that she share her stories with me today. "Miigwetch" she says, and we begin our conversation.

We begin our conversation by talking about how Carmen became involved with Walking with Our Sisters and what brought her to want to be a part of the organization:

I worked 5 years in sexual assault as a crisis counsellor, so it was definitely close to my heart...it was an opportunity for me to be involved in the community in something that I felt that I had something to give...I was being offered something and I would like to offer something back

Carmen's story is unique, but the sentiment that this issue is something that people feel a very close and personal call to want to work and volunteer their time for the bundle is one that I have heard from many members of the Walking with Our Sisters committee. Carmen tells me that working as a crisis counsellor she has worked with clients who have lost sisters, daughter, mothers, and aunts and she felt very grateful that she had the opportunity to offer her skills back to the community to help bring the bundle here.

Carmen tells me about her experiences as someone who attended to visitors outside of the lodge. She begins to tear up in telling me about watching people be so affected by their experience with the bundle:

I watched people enter at a certain pace, and as they walked through, that pace would get slower and slower...they almost looked weighted down...they came in light and walked in...and you can't not feel that energy.

Carmen talks about the energy and spirituality you can feel when you're in that space, and how that affected people walking into the installation more than she thought they had anticipated. She tells me about watching people slow down and carefully look at each individual vamp. She describes how she could see the look on people's faces, and their body language express how they were overwhelmed by seeing the sheer number of vamps, and what those vamps represent: "These are huge things these parents are stripped of".

*How does seeing each individual handmade vamp bring the issue into context? How does the making of the vamps and of the installation bring the issue into context for visitors of the installation?*

As other members of the committee have expressed, there were often difficulties in working with a committee, but Carmen talks about it so beautifully to bring us back to the heart of the installation and why the committee members came to participate:

When you look at all of the vamps, none of them are any higher than the other...they were lined up perfectly...none of us are perfect, we are who we are...when we put it all together, this is what we get...as an art exhibit it was incredibly beautiful.

Carmen tells me about how we need to center ourselves in our work and remind ourselves of why we are there. She tells me about how important the process of laying all the vamps down and making sure they were all given the same attention to bring the installation together helped to create a beautiful installation.

We get at the heart of the conversation, which ultimately has given me a new perspective on this research journey. Carmen and I begin to discuss the heavy emotional burden of doing this kind of work, and the importance of closing in a good way and maintaining self-care. I begin by asking my question to Carmen about how she felt when we closed the installation and when the bundle left. She tells me that the feelings and emotions that are so deeply connected to her through her work with Walking with Our Sisters are still there: “It’s still there obviously...as much as I’m not consciously thinking about it, I think about it and I start to cry”. I reflect on the other conversations I’ve had with members of the committee and this seems to be a recurrent theme: people still have a lot of emotions tied to their experiences with the bundle that have not yet been healed.

Carmen shares her experiences with processing her emotions throughout her time working outside the lodge where the bundle was housed. She says, “In the midst of it, you’re dealing with a lot of emotions...but you’re dealing with the emotions of others”. Although Carmen talks about often experiencing very difficult emotional challenges throughout her work with the bundle, she says she was not given the time to feel what she needed to feel for herself: “You’re trying to be the strength for the others that are coming through”. In my time working through this research journey, I have been continually encouraged to practice my own self-care to ensure that I am doing my work in a good way. *How do we practice self-care in our work with Walking with Our Sisters to ensure that we are doing it in a good way?*

After the installation left, Carmen tells me that she thought that she would have an opportunity to sit with the other members of the Sudbury community and debrief about their experiences with the bundle, and how they felt after the bundle had left. By not having this opportunity, she says she still feels emotional about her experiences.

Our conversation closes with Carmen telling me: “Thank you for this opportunity to sit and talk about it. It’s nice to reconnect and talk about it”. As I’m walking home, this is what I reflect on most: *How does this work create spaces for members of the Walking with Our Sisters Sudbury committee to grieve, and heal?*

**It just made it real. Now that I’ve acknowledged this, what do I do with it**

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

### **Offering Back the Tobacco**

*When we prepare to leave the installation, we offer our tobacco back – we offer back the tobacco after we have taken what we needed from the medicine and give it back to the land*

The goal of this research project was to explore the experiences of the WWOS Sudbury committee in bringing the vision of the WWOS to Sudbury. This research took place in Sudbury, Ontario and aimed to explore the unique experiences of members of the local committee.

The literature reviewed promotes the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Article 24 of UNDRIP which states: “Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals” (UNDRIP, 2008). Aligning this research from a decolonial perspective, this research actively affirms that Indigenous Peoples have the right to have culturally appropriate methods of healing, such as WWOS, to heal colonial trauma.

The original research question of this research project intended to explore how the members of the WWOS Sudbury committee brought the vision of the Grandmothers into the installation to make the installation in the Sudbury community. Through my conversations with members of the community, new themes and questions emerged from these conversations that informed the findings of this research.

Several of the individuals that I had interviewed expressed that they felt the installation did not close in a good way and were not given an opportunity to close their experience with the bundle. As I learned from the Grandmother I interviewed, the spirits of the women, girls, and children were not given an opportunity to leave the space and lingered with members of the

WWOS committee who had spent significant amounts of time with the bundle. As the time commitment to the bundle occupied a lot of time for members of the committee, when the bundle left, people needed time to rest, however; as a committee, after the closing of the installation, we did not make time to debrief together. Several of the individuals I interviewed expressed that they still have a lot of emotions tied to their experience with the bundle and expressed thanks that they were able to be given a safe space to address the emotional, spiritual, and mental distress they still felt after the bundle has left Sudbury. I was incredibly fortunate throughout my experience with WWOS that Joey-Lynn and I had a close connection from the beginning, and I was able to reach out to Joey-Lynn when I was in need of a safe space to talk about my emotional responses to the experience. Two of the participants confided in me that they are friends. While discussing the research project amongst each other her friend reached out to speak to me as well. Ultimately, this research journey allowed me to hold space for non-Indigenous and Indigenous members of the WWOS Sudbury committee and allow them to share, grieve, and feel what they needed to feel. As a non-Indigenous researcher doing work with Indigenous Peoples, I feel incredibly fortunate that I was able to offer these spaces and make this contribution to the community I was working with. It will also be important when bringing the final research project back to community at the community feast that we discuss the importance of self-care when dealing with traumatic subject matter to ensure that we are taking care of our bundles through our work with the WWOS bundle.

The interviews revealed several common themes among the six participants regarding their experiences as members of the WWOS Sudbury organizing preparing for the installation, during the installation, and when the bundle left Sudbury. Although each participant's stories revealed the uniqueness of everyone's relationship with the bundle and their experiences

working in the committee, four themes stand out: 1) personal connections to violence against women, 2) relationships, self-care & debriefing, 3) arts-based methods as a form of healing, and 4) closing the bundle.

## **Violence Against Women**

One of the themes that emerged from the interviews was that all the participants with whom I spoke had experienced violence in their own lives. This revealed that as women who have experienced violence, they felt compelled to want to volunteer their time for WWOS. It is important to acknowledge the strength and resiliency of these women in their efforts to work together towards a collective goal of bringing the installation to Sudbury despite their personal experiences with violence. The personal connection to the subject matter of the WWOS installation added both motivation as well as emotional and mental stress during their time with the installation. Several of them revealed that as they were volunteering their time to take care of the bundle and visitor, that they failed to take care of their own bundle throughout their time with WWOS. Many expressed that their responsibility was to care for visitors who had emotional responses to the installation but did not allow themselves the opportunity to grieve and heal as they needed to. Moving forward, it is important to explore the importance of self-care to ensure that work is being done in a good way.

## **Relationships**

The topic of relationships and of relationship building was an important theme throughout the conversations I had with the participants. Individuals in this research identified the importance of establishing positive relationships to ensure that the work was being done in a



good way that honored and commemorated the lives of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (Bear, 2014).

While they identified with the importance of grassroots organizations allowing for community to come together to bring the bundle to their respective communities, the participants worked their way through solving issues and group dynamics to ensure a successful WWOS installation. Many had very emotional responses to discussing the difficulties they faced in working in a group dynamic as there were many tensions and disagreements about how decisions should be made and how the vision of the Grandmothers should be implemented. Several individuals commented on these difficulties and said that it was important that individuals be mindful of the reasons and intentions that brought them to participate in the organization. These reflections were helpful in understanding how dynamics occur, how they are worked through, and what makes them function.

### **Arts-Based Methods of Healing**

Several participants mentioned that they believed that the arts-based method of the WWOS bundle made the presentation of this difficult subject matter more accessible to everyone, including non-Indigenous persons. All the participants discussed that they thought the ability for visitors to see the time and effort that went into creating each vamp, and seeing the sheer number of vamps, put the MMIWG installation in a holistic perspective. Several participants acknowledged that traditional approaches to conveying information about MMIWG provided an interactive experience that allowed visitors to experience the installation at their own pace and in a self-directed way.

In addition to discussing the importance of the installation as an arts-based healing method, several participants also highlighted the importance of the bundle to function as an

opportunity for non-Indigenous Peoples to learn and experience Ojibwe cultural protocols and ceremony to help promote more understanding of Indigenous ceremony, culture, and MMIWG.

### **Closing the Journey with the Bundle**

Another theme that arose from the interviews was that several of the participants indicated that they felt the installation hadn't closed in a good way and were unable to end their time with the bundle in a good way. They felt the closing ceremony did not close the journey and they were not able to close the journey the organizing committee members shared together. Many participants expressed to me that by sitting down for an interview, they were able to express the final and closing thoughts that they were unable to express at the closing of the installation. These reflections are important as they help to more fully understand the importance of taking care of one's mind, body and spirit from the opening to the closing of a journey with traumatic subject matter.

In summary, the stories and knowledge that were shared with me helped me to identify four themes as particularly important to the participants who shared their stories and knowledge. These themes helped in identifying the strengths and challenges associated with being a member of the WWOS organizing committee.

### **Assumptions, Limitations and Strengths**

A key assumption of this research was that there is a need to create safe spaces for culturally appropriate and relevant healing for individuals who work with traumatic subject matter in grassroots organizations. Due to the traumatic nature of WWOS and MMIWG it is important to recognize the value of self-care throughout each person's journey with the WWOS

bundle. Offering spaces with culturally safe and relevant healing led by Grandmothers helped to re-center those working with the installation.

While the lack of generalizability can be a limitation in any research, the type of research in which I engaged did not lend itself well to comparing with other groups. To generalize this research would be to negate the importance of keeping and respecting individual voices and experiences in research being done with Indigenous communities of Turtle Island, Canada.

Also, as a member of the WWOS Sudbury committee, I carried my personal experience through this research. Rather than attempt to limit bias or keep subjectivity in check by using a Western conception of “unbiased” research, I used my personal knowledge and experience with the WWOS and its participants to better inform my construction of the research and interpretation of the findings.

A limitation of this research project was that I was unable to interview my intended sample size. Of the 24 possible participants that I contacted for an interview, I was able to interview only six individuals. On the other hand, this small sample size allowed me to explore more deeply the individual and unique experiences of a few members of WWOS to honour and respect the time and stories that they shared with me. I changed my original thesis format to reflect the six individuals’ stories rather than try to break the individuals’ stories apart.

Throughout the process of carrying out this research, I hoped to make a positive contribution to decolonial literature about the importance of respecting Indigenous Peoples right to self-determination and culturally appropriate healing methods based on community and ceremony. I hope that this contribution to literature will help foster conversations in our academic communities about the need to approach the field of Indigenous healing through a decolonial lens, and to recognize the value of grassroots organizations in serving Indigenous

communities led through ceremony. From a personal growth perspective, I learned a tremendous amount from the participants I interviewed, and I gained further knowledge and understanding of their unique experiences working with WWOS that I was able to add to my personal knowledge bundle.

The strengths of the research study demonstrate the importance of conducting work with community members and building on preexisting relationships to strengthen community-led, community-based research. The rich nature of the stories shared with me is indicative of the relationships I had with the individuals I interviewed before I began this research journey. As a non-Indigenous researcher, it was important that I highlight the importance of promoting work with Indigenous community members centered on relationship-building.

As previously discussed, it is imperative to bring the research back to the community when conducting research with an Indigenous community. In the research process, I provided the individuals with transcripts of their interviews and the stories I had written based on our conversations. I also was incredibly fortunate to hold a community feast wherein I could share what I found in this research project back with the Sudbury committee. Just as the WWOS bundle is continually passed along, I was able to pass this research along to the community so that people could take what they wanted from the research bundle and add it to their own bundles. I also wrote a short summary of the research to distribute to community, WWOS committee, and anyone else the members of the committee thought would benefit from the work.

After my thesis defense, I will begin the closing of the research process with a smudge and a prayer to close my journey in a good way, surrounded by community, friends, and colleagues.

## **Implications of the Study**

When I started this research journey, I wanted to explore how the Grandmothers envisioned the installation because I was interested in how knowledge from the Grandmothers was conveyed to community members. In my own experience working with the WWOS Sudbury committee, my role was of supporting the work of other individuals, and I did not engage in conversations and discussions about what the installation should look like, as this was not my place. As I began to explore this topic further, it occurred to me that people needed to understand the cultural way of grief and healing. I believe this is important as it highlights the challenges of grassroots organizations in supporting individuals living with trauma associated with missing and murdered Indigenous Women and Girls while also being mindful of their own self-care and journey.

It is important that we are mindful of providing supportive spaces for the strong, resilient women who devote their time to commemorating MMIWG to ensure that while in the process of supporting other Indigenous community members, that they also must take care of themselves. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #19 urges the federal government to close the health equity gap between non-Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Peoples by providing equitable services (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

*After we have given the tobacco back, we smudge as we leave the installation – we smudge when leaving the lodge to cleanse and purify ourselves to end the of our journey to reflect upon, and close the experience in a good way*

Based on the results of this research study, I would recommend the following be

considered for Indigenous grassroots community members to raise awareness of MMIWG and to support those who wish to commemorate these women's lives:

- 1) To promote culturally appropriate and relevant ways of healing to improve physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health of those endeavouring to serve their community's trauma.
- 2) To promote arts-based qualitative research methods in Indigenous health research.
- 3) To strengthen capacity for arts-based healing methods with Indigenous Peoples.
- 4) To end the journey in a good way.

### **Closing and Self-Reflection**

*When the bundle is sent off to the next community, we take the time we need to reflect on what we just experienced*

When the WWOS installation left the Sudbury community and traveled to Kenora, it was important that the members of the WWOS committee took time for self-reflection due to the traumatic nature of the subject of MMIWG. As such, it was essential throughout my research journey that I journaled my experiences and shared my thoughts and feelings with my committee members to ensure that I was taking care of myself through all phases of the research and my research bundle.

As Shawn Wilson explains in *Research Is Ceremony*, "if research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right" (Wilson, 2008, p. 135). This quotation from Wilson is something I have reflected on throughout my research journey as an important part in centering myself in this research project.

The overall experience of working with WWOS was a great privilege and I am incredibly fortunate that I was given the opportunity to work with the organization. When I began my Master's degree in 2017, I had an entirely different research focus and theoretical framework. Becoming involved in a grassroots organization serving Indigenous communities across Canada in culturally appropriate and respectful ways deepened my appreciation for the important work being done by these types of organizations. It was a life-changing experience which taught me so much about the good work being done by the WWOS organization and by people in the Sudbury community who selflessly devote their time to their community to help learn, grow, and heal together.

In our mainstream media we can see the failings of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Inquiry to honour and respect the lives of women and girls lost to violence. It therefore was important to me to produce work for an academic audience that focuses on the good work being done by Indigenous communities, stories that focus on the strength and resiliency of Indigenous Peoples.

I believe that we must shift away from conversations and literature *on* Indigenous Peoples to conversations *with* Indigenous Peoples, valuing Indigenous Peoples' self-determination, wisdom, and resiliency. This research is an important contribution to decolonial literature which situates Indigenous Peoples as the primary knowledge keepers, and the importance on working with community to produce work that is reflective of what the community wants and needs.

As previously discussed, situating myself in this research project as a non-Indigenous researcher required me to consistently reflect on how privileged I was to sit and listen to community members share their personal experiences with me. Through meeting and sitting with

and listening to members of the Walking with Our Sisters committee, I felt that the importance of my work was in providing space for people to express what they needed to express, and feel what they needed to feel. Holding space, patiently listening, and turning their words into narrative pieces was a tremendous privilege and I am forever grateful to the individuals who gave me their time and stories to help me in my research journey.

I admire the work of my professors in the field who focus on decolonizing our institutions, and I hope that this research project will add another piece of decolonial literature to the ongoing conversations about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

### **Epilogue**

On April 4, 2019, I extended an open invitation to members of the WWOS organizing committee to come together to share my research journey with them. This was a special time to reconnect with people who I hadn't connected with since the installation left Sudbury. We at Laurentian University where we sat together, shared food, and reconnected with each other.

I presented an executive summary of my findings to the group and left the discussion open. It was an imperative part of my research journey to bring the research back to the organizing committee to ensure that what I had conveyed in my thesis was representational of the members of the organizing committee. What I heard from the group was the importance of highlighting the positive relationships and experiences that people had in bringing the installation to Sudbury. Although I had threaded the positive experiences of the participants throughout the stories in the thesis, I learned from these women that it was important to note the positive impact the installation had on their lives.



The experience of bringing the research back to those who contributed to the research was a great learning experience for me and helped me to reflect on the teachings from the Grandmother in the research who emphasized the importance of sitting together, sharing stories, and learning together.

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# **Appendices**

## **Appendix “A”: Letter of Information/Consent**

### **RESEARCH PROJECT:**

*Walking With Our Sisters: The Experience of Sudbury Organizing Committee Members in Carrying Out the Vision*

### **LETTER OF INFORMATION & INFORMED CONSENT**

#### **Introduction**

Hello, my name is Julia Rowat and I am interested in re-connecting with members of the Walking With Our Sisters (WWOS) Sudbury committee to explore how the organizing committee members implemented the vision of the local Grandmothers of the exhibit to make it happen in the Sudbury community.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

This study invites you to participate in an interview to share your story on your experiences before, during, and after the WWOS installation, and how you, as a committee member, brought the vision of the Grandmothers into the installation. The purpose of this research is to contribute to current literature about Indigenous grassroots organizations and their potential to offer spaces of healing and well-being for Indigenous Peoples. I plan to give at least one conference presentation on the findings and publish at least one paper about the research.

#### **What do we ask of you?**

I ask that you sit with me and share the story of your experience of being a member of the organizing committee of WWOS Sudbury. In general, we will talk about your experiences before, during and after the installation, and how you felt the vision of the Grandmothers was brought into the installation. Each interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes. I will also ask of you to check the transcript for errors and additions.

#### **Study Requirements**

To participate in this study, you must be a member of the WWOS Sudbury organizing committee. You must be 18 years or older to consent to participate. The session will be audio recorded and later transcribed. All names and identifiers will be removed. The transcripts will be kept until completion of my thesis, approximately 18 months. All transcripts will be securely stored on the hard drive of a double-locked laptop in a password-protected file. There are no other requirements for you to participate in the study. Your total time commitment will be approximately 60-90 minutes, however, if you would like to continue to share your story over the course of more than one session, you and I can discuss that at the end of the session.

**What's in it for you?**

This is an opportunity to share your stories and experiences about working with the WWOS organization. I am seeking information about knowledge and cultural mobilization as well as information on social movements and empowerment strategies. A summary of the study results will be shared with the WWOS Sudbury community, and all those whom the committee believes will benefit from this sharing of knowledge. If you would like, you can receive a summary by email or a hard copy of the research upon completion of the study.

**Confidentiality**

All information regarding your identity will be kept confidential. The data will be secured by password protection and will only be accessible to myself and my thesis committee. Please note that during the interview, should you indicate that you are planning to inflict immediate harm to yourself or others, I am required to report the incident.

**Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time, without consequence. You are in control of what stories and experiences you would like to share.

**Questions**

If you have any questions about how this study is conducted or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Laurentian University Research Office, telephone: 705-675-1151 or toll free at 1-800-461-4030 or email: [ethics@laurentian.ca](mailto:ethics@laurentian.ca). You may also contact one of my co-supervisors: Dr. Joey-Lynn Wabie -- [jl\\_wabie@laurentian.ca](mailto:jl_wabie@laurentian.ca) or Dr. Daniel Cote -- [dcote@laurentian.ca](mailto:dcote@laurentian.ca)

Additionally, if you have questions about the study itself, please contact me at [jrowat@laurentian.ca](mailto:jrowat@laurentian.ca). Please save this information for future reference.

Sincerely,

Julia Rowat, HBA

Candidate, Master of Indigenous Relations

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**INFORMED CONSENT****Consent to Participate**

☐ I have read and understand the Letter of Information explaining the nature of the study and I agree to participate. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ I agree to be audio-recorded and I give consent to the release of the transcripts of those recordings

☐ I am aware that the transcripts will be kept for 18 months and any information that may personally identify me will not be associated with the transcript.

Participant Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**I wish to receive a summary of the results of this study which will be available by September 2019 at the following e-mail address:**

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix “B”: Recruitment E-Mail**

Dear Walking With Our Sisters Sudbury Organizing Committee,

Hello, my name is Julia Rowat and I was a member of the WWOS Sudbury organizing committee. As a graduate student in the Masters of Indigenous Relations program at Laurentian University, I wish to explore how the organizing committee members implemented the vision of the local Grandmothers of the exhibit to make it happen in the Sudbury community.

As described in the attached Information Letter and Consent, I am inviting you to participate in an interview to share your experiences about the WWOS in Sudbury.

Should you wish to participate in the study, please contact me at [jrowat@laurentian.ca](mailto:jrowat@laurentian.ca)

Miigwetch & Thank you,

Julia Rowat

## **Appendix “C”: Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

1. How did you become involved with WWOS Sudbury?
2. What was your role within the WWOS Sudbury committee?
3. What were the first meetings/community conversations like? Could you tell me more about how the installation developed over time?
4. What was your understanding of the Grandmothers’ vision of the installation? How did you put the vision into practice?
5. Tell me about the closing of the installation, and when the bundle left Sudbury?
6. How has the WWOS bundle and the experience of the installation influenced you?
7. Did you have anything to add?

## **Appendix D: Participant Resources**

### **In case of Emergency**

### **Call 911**

**Health Sciences North Crisis Line/Mobile Crisis Unit**  
Number (Crisis Line Open 24/7)

127 Cedar Street, Sudbury  
(705) 675-4760  
Toll free: 1-877-841-1101

**Canadian Mental Health Association**  
Number (Crisis Line Open 24/7)

111 Elm St. #100, Sudbury  
(705) – 675 – 7252  
Toll free: 1-877-841-1101

**N'swakamok Native Friendship Centre**

110 Elm Street, Sudbury  
(705) 647-2128

**Sudbury Counselling Services**

260 Cedar Street, Sudbury  
(705) 524-9629

**Shkagamik-Kwe Health Centre**  
**(Mental Health and Traditional Program)**

161 Applegrove Street  
Sudbury, ON  
(705) 675-1596