A Woven Approach: Decolonizing my Praxis

By

Michaela Louie

B.A. CYC, University of Victoria, 2019

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Sandrina Carere, Supervisor
School of Child and Youth Care

Dr. Mandeep Mucina, Committee Member
School of Child and Youth Care

Abstract

In my thesis, I explore the development and embodiment of my decolonial praxis as an urban Indigenous Child and Youth Care front line practitioner with white privilege. My approach to storywork inquiry weaves together five thematic strands to emphasize the complexities of navigating both white privilege and my responsibility to my Nuu-chah-nulth identity and culture reclamation. My research was conducted through Kinship Rising, a community-led Indigenous research project focused on reclaiming Indigenous resurgence and wellbeing through arts- and land-based storytelling methodologies. Through a methodological cedar weaving process that draws on Nuu-chah-nulth teachings, storywork, a critical review of published and grey literature, and photographic collages, I explore five interrelated thematic strands: colonial disconnection and the impact on Indigenous people in what is now colonially called Canada; my own identity as a Nuu-Chah-Nulth urban Indigenous woman with white privilege; my academic experiences; the development of my front line, decolonial praxis ethics, and; my personal

process of reclaiming my Nuu-chah-nulth identity and culture. In weaving critical

literature, storywork and photographic collages together, I acknowledge the political,

practice, and personal dimensions of being an urban Indigenous Child and Youth Care

front line practitioner with white privilege, and how this relates to supporting advocacy,

justice, and decolonization in front line praxis. My thesis concludes with a discussion of

implications that contribute to Indigenous knowledge about the complexities of

Indigenous praxis, education and reclamation for a growing population of urban, mixed-

race Indigenous young people with white privilege.

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Acknowledgements

Territorial Acknowledgement

I would like to begin with an acknowledgement and appreciation for the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples on whose territories I was born and raised. I hold gratitude and give thanks for these lands and their stewards, both human and nonhuman, for caring for these territories that have played such a significant role in raising me. ʕuušy̓akšiƛiiʔc – I thank you for this gift.

Chapter 1: Who Are You and Where Do You Come From?

A Nuu-chah-nulth teaching I hold is that the first questions we ask upon meeting someone new are "Who are you?" and "Where are you from?" (Atleo, 2009, p. 1). From the beginning of my livelihood in the Child and Youth Care (CYC) field, I have taken this teaching to heart, and it has guided how I have come to know those I work with. My thesis has been a journey of taking this teaching and turning it inward as a process of reclamation; I have sought to answer these questions for myself and for my praxis as an urban Indigenous CYC practitioner with white privilege, in order to understand what decolonial praxis looks like for me given my positionality.

As is necessary in Indigenous research methodologies (Steinhauer, 2002; Wilson, 2003, 2008), I want to take the time to introduce and locate myself in order to provide clarity on the epistemological and methodological perspectives that guide my research and my story. My name is Michaela Louie. My mother's family is from what is now colonially known as Ontario, with roots in England, Scotland, and Wales. My father's family is *nuučaań̓uⱡ* (Nuu-chah-nulth) from the Ahousaht Nation. I am the eldest daughter of five children. As an Indigenous woman with white privilege growing up

urban in a settler colonial state, I have spent my life walking in two worlds. I live deeply

within the colonial violence and trauma that has been enacted against my Indigenous

family and community, as well as in the beauty, strength, and resilience that have been

passed on to me. I also live deeply in the white privilege that has been passed on to me by

my white family, as well as with the responsibility of unsettling my whiteness within a

white supremacist settler colonial state. I write about my thesis topic from the two worlds

that I walk in, as for me, they are inseparable and tightly woven together. It is in part

because of these experiences that I chose to become a CYC worker and pursue an MA to

do clinical front line work with children, youth and families.

It is important to understand who I am, where I come from, and what influences

my beliefs in order to understand my epistemological and methodological framework.

The unceded Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ lands I live on and the kinships and relationships I

have experienced on these lands have shaped my worldview. Although I am Indigenous

from Vancouver Island, I am still a settler on Coast Salish territories. It is also important

for me to acknowledge and take responsibility for the white privilege that I gain by living

under a white supremacist state. Vikki Reynolds (2012) states the importance of "calling

in" our fellow white people, and I include calling myself in as an ethic of settler

accountability. I am practicing being mindful that while I am reclaiming parts of my

identity and my culture, I do not overlook other parts of myself, including the white

power and privilege that I hold as part of my mixed-race identity.

Reflecting on who I am and the experiences I have had in my 27 years of life

provides insight as to how I fit in community and how this emerges in my CYC praxis.

While I feel as though I sit in a privileged position, it is important for me to recognize

and honour my experiences produced by colonialism, and how they help shape me. I grew up in a single-parent household. I lived in low-income family housing. My family is quite poor. My father is a racialized First Nations man. Multiple family members have experienced addiction, family violence, intergenerational trauma, homelessness, and incarceration. I have witnessed violence. I have survived violence. Family members struggle with mental health. I have struggled with mental health.

My thesis delves into how these stories shape my approach to decolonial praxis, the interconnection between my ethics, values, and actions. Following the principles of Indigenous storywork, my research is deliberately focused on my personal story and experiences. Because I have grown up disconnected from my culture, identity and homelands, focusing on my story of reclamation is in itself a decolonial act; it is in itself a form of decolonial praxis.

My thesis involved making meaning of my personal story by pulling teachings from Indigenous and critical literature and course readings from my time in postsecondary education, and weaving those together with Nuu-chah-nulth teachings and my own memories and experiences of my reclamation journey. Throughout my thesis, my stories and memories are presented in red italics, alongside photographic collages that represent my journey from childhood to now. This methodological process has produced a woven approach to decolonizing my praxis as an urban Indigenous CYC practitioner with white privilege.

Weaving these strands together is essential in order to develop and embody a decolonial praxis. Colonization has a hand in significantly shaping my experience. Ethiopian feminist journalist and professor Martha Kuwee Kumsa (2007) writes that

healing requires the mutual liberation of Self and Other through creating space for encounters of unlearning oppression. I see CYC praxis as an encounter for healing colonial oppression; by having a deep understanding of Self, I can begin to learn about Others and how intimately intertwined our healing is. It is important to honour and acknowledge what I have experienced, what I continue to experience, and all that I have learned from it. I have gained concrete social, educational and economic benefits and have been spared many experiences of overt racism and racial profiling due to the white privilege I have inherited from my mixed-race identity. At the same time, although we all experience the world differently, experiences of pain and oppression are not foreign to me. It is equally as important for me to hold space for everything that has been taken from me due to colonization, and to understand the intergenerational impact this has had on my family. Settler colonial carceral and necropolitical internments such as residential schools, prisons, and child welfare, and intersecting forms of genocidal colonial policies (physical, environmental, spiritual, and cultural) that have spanned both my and my family's lifetimes have intentionally disrupted and disconnected us from our families, communities, Nations, culture, and lands (de Finney, Sam, et al., 2019). Holding space for all of these experiences has been a journey of discovery, learning, and healing that I will be on for the rest of my life.

Developing and Embodying a Decolonial CYC Praxis

Since time immemorial, Nuu-chah-nulth people have practiced the art form of weaving, using cedar and grass to create hats, headbands, baskets, mats, and much more. Harvesting, preparing, and weaving are meticulous work, requiring knowledge, skill, patience, persistence, time, and determination. Colonial polices such as the potlatch

ban and residential schools disrupted this cultural practice, interrupting sacred knowledge and skills from being passed down among families and communities. When traditional whaling was outlawed, the weaving of whalers' baskets and Maquinna hats became less practiced. Through the strength, diligence, persistence, and reclamation of Nuu-chah-nulth people, our beautiful art form of weaving has survived.

During my thesis, I have had the opportunity to participate in two different weaving workshops. At one I was taught to make a woven cedar headband, and at the other I created a small whaler's basket out of sedge grass.

This required patience and humility for the actual act of weaving, as well as a process of searching deep within myself to find the ancestral skill and ability to engage in this art form that has been passed on to me. Engaging in weaving felt hard at first.

My hands felt clumsy as I worked with the cedar and sedge grass materials. I had to be kind to myself. I had to forgive myself for not knowing how to weave. I had to acknowledge the pain that was coming up for having this skill taken away from me.

I had to breathe. I became determined. I folded the cedar. I wove the sedge grass.

I undid clumsy work. I redid it. I intentionally wove cedar and sedge grass to complete

beautiful creations.

I chose to center my storywork methodology in both the act and metaphor of weaving. I created my woven methodology to outline the implications I face in holding white privilege alongside a responsibility for identity and culture reclamation. As part of my research process, I committed to learning how to weave both cedar and sedge grass and created a woven cedar headband that I wore while writing the final chapter of my thesis. As I explain in my final chapter, wearing my headband in public represented a pivotal moment of decolonial embodied reclamation for me, an act of standing proudly as an urban Indigenous Nuu-chah-nulth woman with white privilege who is seeking to develop and embody my decolonial and social justice commitments.

A central theme in my thesis is understanding how my role in supporting children, youth and families -my CYC praxis- can be infused with decolonial ethics and actions.

For me, decolonization requires embodying praxis, which is an active engagement with actions, ideas, ethics, and values (Wilson & Yellowbird, 2005). In speaking about praxis, I refer to the ethics, values and everyday commitments and actions that shape how I approach my identity, front line practice, and educational journey in a way that promotes unsettling colonial logics. Praxis entails the ability to engage simultaneously in an ethic of action and reflection (Friere, 1993; Wright Cardinal, 2017). I understand praxis in the same way that I understand decolonization—as an extension beyond our understanding of theory, moving into a space of transformative and applied, embodied action, theory and practice.

The importance of developing and embodying a decolonial CYC praxis has been highlighted by many scholars and practitioners (Kouri, 2014, 2019; Loiselle et al., 2012; Mackenzie, 2019; Moreno & Mucina, 2019; Reynolds 2008, 2012; Richardson & Reynolds, 2012). The intention of my research is to inspire more visibility in academia on the unique experiences of urban Indigenous CYC practitioners with white privilege, and the implications that holding both white privilege and the responsibility of reclaiming Indigenous identity has on developing and embodying a decolonial praxis in CYC education and front line work. My thesis contributes to current literature on Indigenous reclamation by outlining my journey of decolonizing pieces of my history, identity, education, and front line practice; it speaks to common issues experienced by urban, mixed-race Indigenous young people with white privilege, and offers implications for supporting the embodiment of decolonial ethics in front line and post-secondary settings.

As will be explained in further detail in my methodology chapter, my research was conducted as part of Kinship Rising[1], an Indigenous arts-based, community-led research project at the University of Victoria that is focused on restoring Indigenous practices of wellbeing, healing, and resurgence. By working with a larger research collective, I will have the opportunity to share my thesis widely through the Kinship Rising network, including through open access publications, websites, presentations, and social media features. It is important for me to create accessible research, so that the Indigenous knowledge I am creating and sharing can reach other CYC students, practitioners and educators, and be accessible to Indigenous communities, including my own.

White Seeming, White Privilege and White Power

Another central theme of my study is whiteness, and understanding how whiteness has shaped my life and my front line praxis. A key theme both in the literature and in my own experience related to whiteness and racial identity formation is that of white privilege, which describes the benefits, material or otherwise, that comes from having white or light skin and being included in the white racial order (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003; McIntosh, 1990). Rodriguez (2000) emphasizes that "race is not a natural, fixed, phenomena but rather a social construct whose one constant or guarantee is its changing significance and effects given its evolving historical interaction and intersection with the political" (p.5). White racial logics and white supremacy have always been at the center of the Canadian settler state project (Saad, 2020). More than just an ideology,

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[1] For more information about Kinship Rising, please visit
https://onlineacademiccommunity.uvic.ca/kinshiprising/

white supremacy controls how systems and institutions are structured to uphold white life (Laliberte, 2022).

In order to maintain their white dominance, settler states have closely governed how Indigenous people can identify, and what constitutes Indigeneity (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The Canadian state has for hundreds of years imposed mixed, increasingly white identities on Indigenous peoples through legislation, policies of enforced mixing, gendered violence and gendered discrimination, the pass system, the Indian Act, and many other means (Lawrence, 2004). My family and nation have experienced these policies and my whiteness is a result of colonial history and ongoing constructed, controlled, and contested colonial logics of Indigeneity.

It is important for me to acknowledge the implications of my white privilege in seeking to develop and embody a decolonial praxis as an urban, mixed-race Indigenous CYC practitioner. When it comes to reclaiming my Indigenous identity, I am going through a journey of discovering what feels right for myself. Mixed-race, mixed-ancestry, white-passing, white-privileged, white-seeming, white-coded, white, Indigenous, Nuu-chah-nulth, Aboriginal, First Nations, urban, settler, half-this-and-half-that are some of the identities that are available to me. Some of these I have considered for myself, and some of these are identities that have been placed or imposed on me without my consent or input. Depending on where I look for clarification on my identity, I find a different answer. According to my status card issued to me by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, I have "Indian status." At the University of Victoria, I am an "Indigenous student." If I asked a stranger on the street, they would most likely code me as "white." When I ask my family who I am, they tell me I am *Quu'as'a,* I am Nuu-chah-

nulth from the Ahousaht Nation. When I initially considered all of the terms available for me to identify with, I was left deciding between *white seeming* and *white passing*.

The concept of white passing is more commonly used than white seeming; socially it refers to a non-white person's ability to look like a white person, generally because they have a lighter skin tone (Pierre, 2021, as cited by Paul et al., 2023). In a more general sense, Brooke Kroeger (2003) defines passing as "when people effectively present themselves as other than who they understand themselves to be" (p. 7). It is important to highlight how, historically and presently, *white passing* has aided those who would pass in avoiding poor treatment and racial discrimination (Paul et al., 2023). Whereas, Adrian Downey (2018) specifically defines *white seeming* as when a person is mistakenly seen as white and therefore gains access to privilege through this mistaken identity. One of the reasons Downey does not use the term white passing is his perception of the embedded element of "intentional deception not being consistent with [his] experience of being a fair-skinned Indigenous person" (p. 2).

In a research project that explores the experiences of navigating racism and discrimination among Métis, two-spirit, and gender-diverse community members in Victoria when accessing health services, Willow Paul et al. (2023) discuss how passing as white comes with a unique set of challenges and privileges. Challenges include negative impacts on one's sense of self and identity, tensions of "prizing" whiteness due to white supremacy, feelings of inadequacy, fear of disclosing one's identity, and having one's identity assumed or questioned. Privileges include not facing discrimination due to skin colour; some participants even claimed they had never experienced racism (Paul et

al., 2023). While the privileges of white passing cannot be ignored, I appreciate and relate to this quote from Downey (2018):

> When I am seen as [w]hite, I do gain access to privilege, but the erasure of my Indigenous identity and my tacit assimilation are allowed to continue. There is no dichotomy to this privilege; privilege and penalty exist simultaneously in the same aspect of my identity. (p. 8)

While I do not hold the same critiques of the term white passing, I resonate with what Downey (2018) writes about white seeming privilege. When I reflect on my experience, the white privilege I hold does not afford me the same ease as the privilege non-Indigenous white people have in settler colonial Canada. My white privilege comes with the penalty of colonial disruption, theft of culture, identity and lands, and ancestral disconnection, as well as the harm and violence enacted on my family, culture, community, and Nation.

As an urban mixed-race Indigenous person, while I have a status card and am registered as a member of the Ahousaht nation, I am typically coded as a white person within settler colonial society. As a core component of my decolonial praxis, I must acknowledge that the settler colonial system grants me certain privileges because I am white coded, "and it is my responsibility to carry this privilege, acknowledge it, and work to dismantle the structures that whiteness and settler colonialism uphold" (Coon, 2014, p. 6). Simultaneously, I will forever live with intergenerational trauma, shame, grief, and loss, as well as ongoing disconnection from the homelands, language, and culture that are my birthrights. I will always be repairing, reclaiming, and trying to hold all of these complexities at once. It is a heavy load. It is from within the complex and simultaneous

existence of privilege and penalty that my desire to define my own decolonial praxis emerges.

While I reserve the right at any point to change how I wish to identify, at this point in my journey, and for consistency within my thesis, I have settled on the following terms to use when I speak of myself. When I refer to myself in my work, I use the term *urban Indigenous CYC practitioner*, and when relevant I follow that with "with white privilege." When I am talking about myself in connection to my family and my culture, I refer to myself as *Nuu-chah-nulth*, sometimes followed by "from the Ahousaht Nation." When I generally refer to myself, I use *urban Indigenous*, and when relevant I follow that with "with white privilege." When I use the term *mixed-race*, I am referring to holding both white settler ancestry as well as Indigenous ancestry.

Forming a Decolonial Praxis as an Indigenous Practitioner with White Privilege
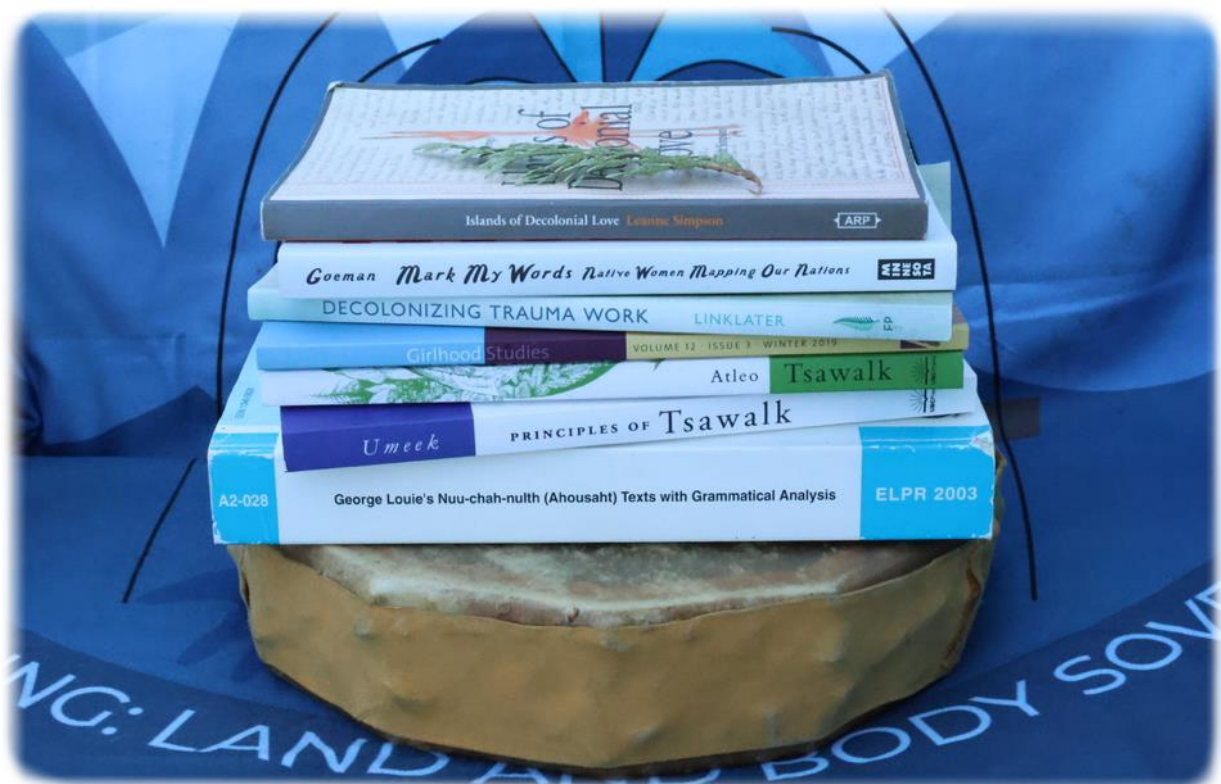
Throughout my time in postsecondary education, and specifically in the CYC undergraduate and graduate programs, I have been exposed to many brilliant scholars who have inspired me to look at decolonizing my own practice. I have been inspired by authors and practitioners who discuss frameworks such as "decolonizing is not a metaphor" (Tuck & Yang, 2012), "justice-doing as an ethic" (Reynolds 2008, 2012; Richardson & Reynolds, 2012), centering Indigenous knowledge and practices (Baskin, 2016; Linklater, 2014; Loiselle et al., 2012), and understanding what it means to critically and politically think and locate myself within my work (Kouri, 2014, 2019; Moreno & Mucina, 2019; Watts-Jones, 2010). Many of the brilliant scholars and practitioners who have inspired me have been Indigenous, Black, People of Colour (POC), racialized, and/or allied folks who work towards doing decolonial and critically reflexive work with children, youth, and families. While I have been inspired by their work, I have often wondered where exactly I fit into their methods and decolonial processes, as I find myself somewhere in-between identities. When it comes to my identity and how I walk through this world, it is less of an either/or situation and more of this and that. In other words, it is less a case of "I am Indigenous but I am white" and more that I am Indigenous and I have white privilege.

As someone who is Indigenous with white privilege, the process of decolonizing my praxis extends beyond unlearning colonial rhetoric and leaving space for other ways of knowing, doing, and being. A lot of the decolonizing practice methods that I have read about and practiced in my front line work operate from the perspective that the practitioner is non-Indigenous, acting as a white, Black, or POC racialized ally. On the other side, in a lot of the literature I have engaged with where the target audience are

Indigenous practitioners, the narrative shifts from how to cultivate a decolonial practice to centering Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being (e.g., Archibald, 2008; Baskin, 2016; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Due to urbanization and cultural disruption and disconnection, I am not far enough along in my reclamation journey yet to be able to operate from a comprehensive Indigenous ontology. Part of my process of decolonizing my CYC praxis involves a journey of identity and cultural reclamation, which includes stepping into, and centering, these other ways of knowing, doing, and being and going about this in a respectful and intentional way.

CYC Praxis as Livelihood

In my thesis, I describe my work in the CYC field as my livelihood, a concept inspired by Clifford Gordon Atleo, a Tsimshian and Nuu-chah-nulth professor and researcher. Atleo (2008) stresses that the "use of livelihood is not without certain complications, but . . . is a good entry point, to going beyond the narrower conceptions of employment, work, or jobs" (p. 8). I am opting for this term over words such as career or job to acknowledge that my engagement with practice roles extends beyond the purpose of gaining an income. Atleo's (2008) perspective on the term livelihood has inspired how I view my role as an Indigenous CYC practitioner and what it means to go about this in a Nuu-chah-nulth way. By choosing to use the concept of livelihood, I aim to encompass a richer understanding of what I do in my life to sustain my family and community and to enact the ethical commitments that guide how I live my life. In separating our lives into work, leisure, school, play, volunteerism, and spiritual time, we risk acting in ways contrary to our teachings of oneness, respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (Atleo, 2008).

Since I started my livelihood in frontline human service and community work at the age of 18, I have held a wide variety of positions, including but not limited to educational support assistant, summer camp leader, youth engagement facilitator, harm reduction outreach worker, shelter support staff, support worker, youth outreach worker, school-based youth and family counsellor, research facilitator, and counsellor. While most of these positions were not Indigenous specific, I have always brought my own values, teachings, and practices into my work. At this present time, I am an intern counsellor at an LGBTQ2IA+ specialized counselling practice in Victoria, B.C., offering affirming care for queer, transgender, lesbian, bisexual, gay, two-spirit, or questioning youth, adults, and families. I support clients from an anti-oppressive, person-centered, strengths-based, trauma-informed, and decolonial lens, and I draw practices from Western and Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being.

One of the initial quandaries that inspired my thesis was my curiosity and sense of responsibility around intentionally exploring my own identity as an urbanized Indigenous CYC practitioner with white privilege, and the implications of my positionality on developing and embodying a decolonial praxis. While there are calls for specific decolonial work to be done by settlers (Coon, 2014; Mackenzie, 2019; Moreno & Mucina, 2019), I have wondered what decolonial work is important for me to do and embody, given my own identity, as I hold dual responsibilities as an Indigenous person with white privilege. This is the central question that shaped my research and my approach to storywork.

Research Summary: A Woven Methodology

As I explore in the following chapters, my methodology presents thematic strands, which I weave together to outline my woven approach to decolonial praxis, written from my perspective as an urban Indigenous CYC practitioner with white privilege. Following a discussion of my woven methodology in Chapter 2, I outline themes that represent the five different strands of a woven Nuu-chah-nulth cedar headband:

Strand 1: Colonial Disconnection and Identity. In this strand, I explore themes of whiteness, "playing Indian," and colonial policies and tactics that have intentionally caused cultural and identity shame, guilt, grief, and disconnection for Indigenous peoples across Canada -including my own family. I explore how Canadian colonial policies have supported genocide by targeting Indigenous practices and values related to reciprocity, community, identity, and gender.

Strand 2: Educational and Academic Experiences. This strand explores how my educational and academic stories and experiences in the Canadian education and post-secondary systems have contributed to my understanding of my Indigenous identity that I ground in literature. I explore what I learned about decolonial praxis in studying to become a CYC practitioner.

Strand 3: Praxis Ethics. Ethics of "unsettling settler practices" and "justice-doing" are discussed in detail as to how they relate to the effects of colonization on Indigenous families and front line practice. My storywork in this strand explores how I understand and embody decolonial praxis as an urban Indigenous CYC practitioner and social justice advocate with white privilege.

Strand 4: Reclamation Journey. Parts of my reclamation journey are shared in this strand, and I outline my engagements with identity, culture and returning home, as well as with the inevitable processes of shame, grief and silencing that are so deeply embedded in decolonizing Indigenous identity in a colonial state.

Strand 5: Indigenous Decolonization in Praxis. My final strand discusses the implications of reclaiming and embodying my Indigenous identity, culture and my decolonial praxis. This strand relates to supporting advocacy, justice, and decolonization in my everyday life as an urban Indigenous advocate, front line practitioner, and proud Nuu-chah-nulth community member.

My final chapter, *Wearing my Headband*, explores interconnected questions and stories focused on education, practice, and identity reclamation, as they connect together to form a decolonial praxis. I offer a discussion of implications that contribute to Indigenous knowledge about the complexities of Indigenous praxis, education and reclamation for a growing population of urban, mixed-race Indigenous young people with white privilege. It is my hope that my thesis will support a positive narrative of reclamation and decolonization that will guide me in my life and contribute to other decolonial pathways in my community, and that will be useful to other urban, mixed-race Indigenous young people with white privilege, students, front line practitioners, and educators working to unsettle white privilege and uphold decolonial ethics in practice.

Chapter 2: A Woven Methodology

Raven with a Message

On February 26, 2024, I went for a walk down by the Songhees Harbour walkway. It was beautifully sunny outside. As I was walking back home, I saw a crow perched on a railing. The crow was quite close to where I was walking, and was very calm despite me getting closer. I stopped to look at them for a moment. While I was stopped to watch, they started cawing and cawing. I was taking a video and captured what they were saying. Crows have a significant meaning to me, as my late grandma and I both loved crows. I always stop to share a moment with them when I can. Later that day, when I was having a meeting with my supervisor, she gifted me a beautiful pouch made by Denise Williams, a Nuu-chah-nulth artist. She told me it was the raven, and that the raven had something in

their mouth; it was a message and they had something to say. This felt significant to me, as black birds, whether a raven or a crow, hold such significant meaning to me. She told me to remember this message when I am writing my thesis, and that I have a message to share, just like the raven.
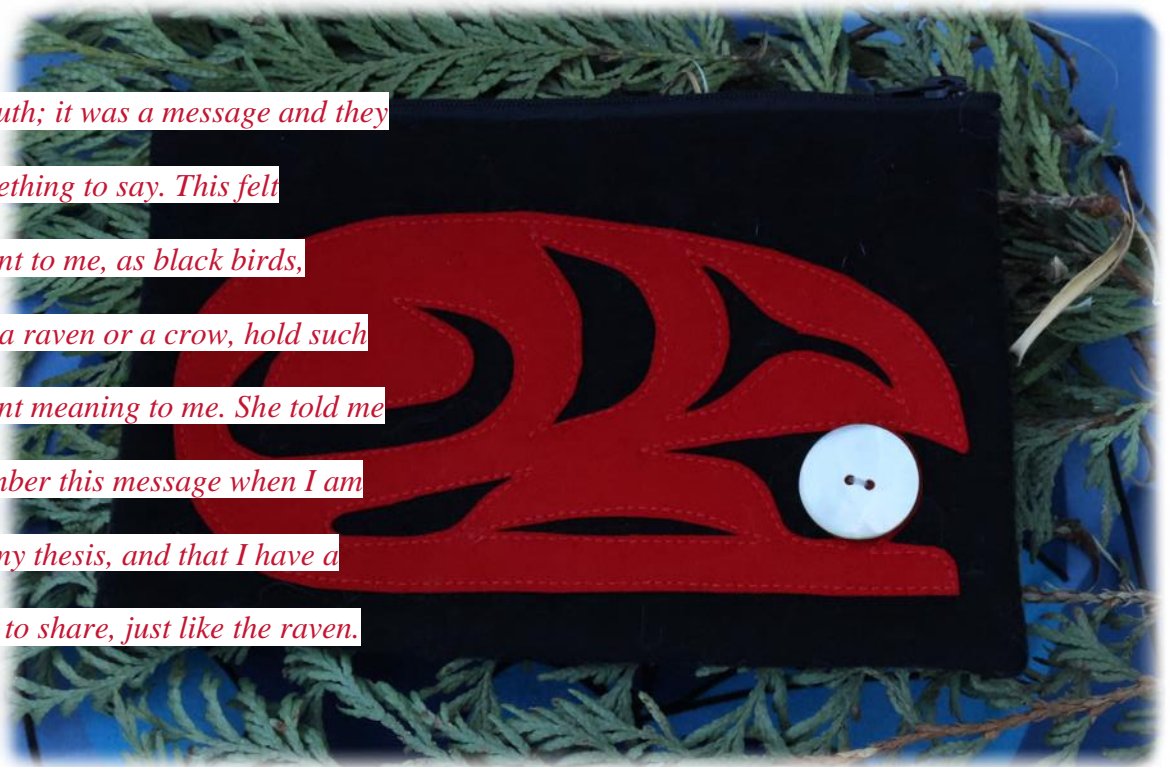
Jo-Ann Archibald (2008) describes life-experience stories as sharing our stories in our own ways and creating discourses based on our Indigenous knowledge systems. Indigenous research aims to address Indigenous issues and advance wellness for Indigenous communities (Archibald, 2008; Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). The purpose of this research project extends beyond completing my thesis and graduating with my MA in CYC: I am

seeking to contribute to my own Indigenous wellness and to the collective good of my community through a process of reclamation and reconnection with my Nuu-chah-nulth identity and culture (Absolon, 2011; Wright Cardinal, 2017). Our communities need and deserve new generations who, despite living urban and with white privilege and layered identities, feel proud of and connected to their Indigenous identities, communities, and homelands.

There is also a need for examples on what developing and embodying decolonial praxis can look like for urban Indigenous front line practitioners with white privilege. Indigenous educators such as Archibald (2008), Marie Battiste (2013), and Verna Kirkness (2013) refer to this as "heart work". Doing "heart work" creates a sacred space to situate myself in relation to my research topic, and allows for the implementation of Indigenous storytelling methods (Wright Cardinal, 2017). By engaging in heart work, I am able to tend to the interwoven emotional, spiritual, physical and cognitive aspects of my reclamation journey; this in turn has enabled me to develop and seek to embody a decolonial praxis, which I hope contributes to the emerging body of Indigenous literature in the CYC field, and offers implications for supporting urban, mixed-race Indigenous students with white privilege, as well as practitioners, community members, and educators.

Kinship Rising

I conducted my storytelling heart work as part of a larger Indigenous community-based research project called Kinship Rising. Kinship Rising is a SSHRC-funded, arts- and land-based, community-led research project based at the University of Victoria that is focused on restoring Indigenous practices of wellbeing and sovereignty-making (Carere

& Yamauchi, 2024; de Finney, Bennett, et al., 2021; de Finney, Sam, et al., 2019). In response to the epidemic of colonial violence impacting Indigenous communities, Kinship Rising projects provide hands-on, land- and arts-based research workshops created for and by Indigenous youth, young adults, and community members on issues related to reclamation, healing, and resurgence. Kinship Rising has worked with hundreds of Indigenous participants across British Columbia and beyond to create multi-media research projects that are shared with a broad network. Kinship Rising adapts arts-based, land-based and storytelling methods that generate productive engagement and centre ethics, creativity, and good protocols (de Finney, Sam, et al., 2019). The Kinship Rising methodological framework aims to rupture and unsettle the usual pathologies created by research about Indigenous people by re-storying colonial ideologies, and nurturing ceremonial, political, and interpersonal channels that restore dignity and advocacy for and by Indigenous communities (Carere & Yamauchi, 2024).
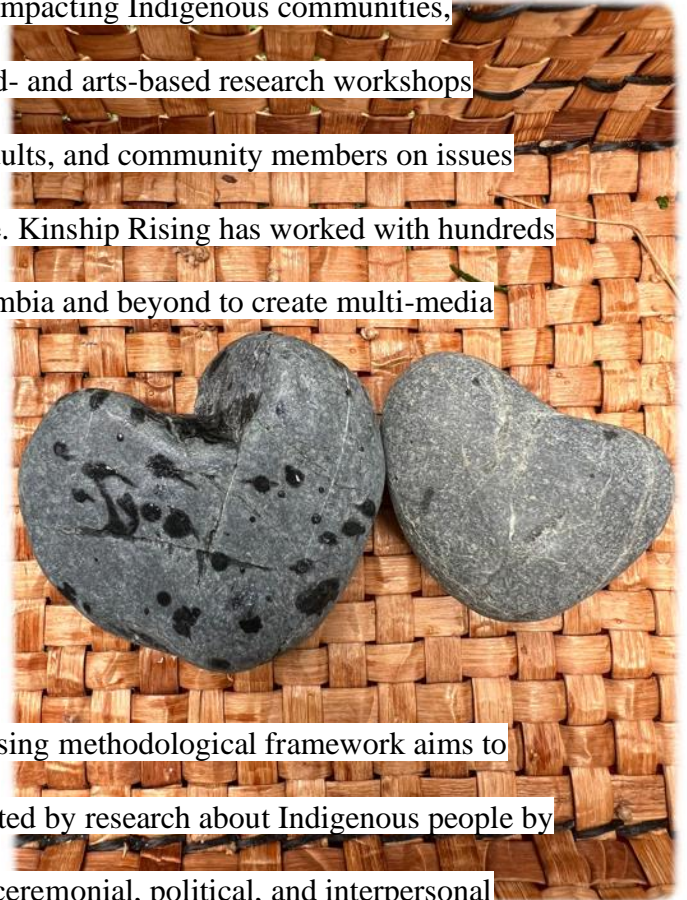
I became a student affiliated with Kinship Rising in 2018, and in this role I joined an active research network of Indigenous communities, researchers, youth, and other students.

I completed an undergraduate research internship with Kinship Rising during which I

took part in an international forum on reclaiming Indigenous teachings of gender

wellbeing. Through the years I have participated in several other Kinship Rising research

events, including art- and land-based workshops. Kinship Rising supports Indigenous

students in doing their own research with their communities and on topics and stories that are related to Indigenous wellbeing and resurgence. For my MA thesis, I opted not to conduct my own community-based research project with other participants. Instead, I chose to focus on my own storywork; speaking my story has been a critical first step in decolonizing my history, spirit, body, and connection to my identity and community. I was drawn to a storywork methodology because it highlights the importance of honouring Indigenous storytelling protocols.

Upholding the ethical framework developed by Kinship Rising, my research centres ethics of dignity, leadership, relational consent, self-determination, strength, complexity, and hope (de Finney, Bennett, et al., 2021). I drew on ethical tools I gained through Kinship Rising to explore my own journey of learning about research (re-search) and reclamation ethics both as a student and as a CYC practitioner. My research process was covered through the extensive Kinship Rising research ethics protocol. An important component of my research ethics was having permission from my family to share the brief excerpts that speak about family members -namely my father's history and some teachings shared with me by my auntie. My family had the opportunity to read and approve my storywork before my thesis went to my second committee member and external.

Guiding Questions

Representing the strands of a woven cedar headband, my thesis is organized as a series of five themes that come together to tell my story of developing and embodying decolonial praxis. My approach to methodological weaving brings together multiple

methods and a transdisciplinary lens to explore five interconnected questions and stories.

The five research questions that guided my weaving process include:

1. What is my story as an urban, mixed race Indigenous young person with white

   privilege seeking to reclaim my identity and embody more ethical decolonial

   engagements in my practice and everyday life? What decolonial work is

   important for me to do, given my identity of being an urban Indigenous

   practitioner with white privilege?

2. How do my educational experiences and practical experience in the CYC field

   influence my reclamation journey as an urban Indigenous CYC practitioner with

   white privilege?

3. How does my own reclamation journey allow me to develop and embody a

   decolonial praxis? What are my ethical obligations for doing decolonial work,

   taking into account the unique privileges that come with being an urban

   Indigenous person with white privilege, while also discussing the process of

   decolonizing my own worldview by respectfully and intentionally connecting to

   my Indigenous identity and culture?

4. How can I center our traditional Nuu-chah-nulth teachings of oneness, respect,

   reciprocity, and responsibility into my decolonial praxis?

5. What can my woven approach to decolonial praxis contribute to the growing body

   of literature in the CYC field, to other urban, mixed-race Indigenous young

   people with white privilege, as well as to educators and practitioners seeking to

   support decolonial ethics?

Drawing on these guiding questions, my methodology integrates a critical approach to an integrative literature review (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2005) woven with Indigenous storywork (Archibald, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Kovach, 2009; McIvor, 2010; Thomas, 2000, 2005). As I explain below, my approach to Indigenous storywork weaves together memories presented in red italics and photographic collages that are presented throughout the thesis.

Critical, Integrative Literature Review

The first method in my woven methodology is a critical, integrated review of the literature on the topics outlined in my research questions above. A critical approach to an integrative literature review was chosen as one of my research methods because it has allowed me to explore the emerging topic of decolonizing CYC praxis as an urban Indigenous practitioner with white privilege, a topic that benefits from a critical and holistic conceptualization and synthesis of literature connected to my topic (Torraco, 2005).

An integrative literature review is a method for critically reviewing, reconceptualizing, and expanding on literature (Snyder, 2019). The purpose of an integrative literature review is not to systematically identify and synthesize all literature on a topic; rather, it requires a creative collection and integration of literature composed of different perspectives and insights (Snyder, 2019) combined with my own creative process of including my intimate knowledge of the topic (Torraco, 2005).

My approach to the literature review is critical in the sense that I identified literature that speaks to my themes of history and identity, Indigenous students' academic experiences, decolonial praxis ethics, unsettling whiteness, and identity and culture

reclamation. Therefore, I drew on an analytical lens that is grounded in Indigenous theories, and on anticolonial, critical race, and critical literature in practice fields such as CYC. I searched for literature that discussed my various topics, including: unsettling whiteness and white privilege (Coon, 2014; Laliberte, 2022; Mackenzie, 2019; Saraceno, 2012); understanding colonization and actively engaging in decolonization (Coon, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wright Cardinal 2017); Indigenous identities and Indigenous urban identities (Coon, 2014; Goeman, 2013; Lawrence 2004; Wright Cardinal, 2017); Indigenous feminisms and gender studies (Anderson, 2000; Coon, 2014; Goeman, 2013; Lawrence 2004; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; Simpson, 2011, 2014; Wright Cardinal, 2017); decolonial and social justice ethics, and ethics of justice-doing in frontline practice (Kouri, 2014, 2019; Moreno & Mucina 2019; Reynolds 2008, 2012; Richardson & Reynolds, 2012); centering Indigenous knowledge and practices (Baskin, 2016; Linklater, 2014; Loiselle et al., 2012); Nuu-chah-nulth culture and histories (Atleo, 2008; Umeek, 2004), and; understanding what it means to critically and politically think and locate myself within my CYC and frontline praxis (Kouri, 2014, 2019; Moreno & Mucina, 2019; Watts-Jones, 2010). Through this critical theoretical lens, I was able to identify and analyze themes in the literature related to Indigenous identity and subject formation, power, whiteness, settler colonialism, decolonization, social justice, front line practice, praxis, and reclamation.

My search for literature was a multistep process: I spent months searching for, organizing, collating, summarizing and comparing publications, articles and grey literature. Initially, I sorted through articles and course materials from my undergraduate

and graduate classes in CYC, collecting literature on themes such as Indigenous CYC

practice, decolonization, Indigenous identity, reclamation, whiteness, privilege, social

justice, impacts of colonial policies, and Indigenous students' experiences in education.

Once I had gathered, reviewed, and made notes on this literature, I expanded my review

to include other publications, theses and dissertations on similar topics. From there, I

reviewed their reference lists and found further literature that related to my chosen

themes, in addition to published reports, chapters and articles. I have included literature

that spans from the year 1990 to the present. My choice to include literature from within

a wide range of publication dates reflects my understanding that Indigenous knowledge

has been around since time immemorial. We have always been researchers and

knowledge seekers, and we are always generating new knowledge whether it be cultural,

scientific, community based, or on contemporary topics (Absolon & Willet, 2004).

   Rather than reviewing each article separately, my integrated literature review

synthesizes the themes I have explored. Therefore, the chapters of my thesis are written

narratively, weaving together the literature with my own stories and voice (LaBoucane-

Benson et al., 2017). This approach requires a process of synthesizing streams of

research, integrating existing ideas with new ideas and my own voice and stories, and

focusing on core themes rather than only reporting on existing literature. This process

allows for the emergence of new knowledge and perspectives on the topic, as well as

emerging questions and implications for future research (Torraco, 2005). These will be

addressed in the final chapter of my thesis. In addition to a critical, integrative literature

review, my woven methodology also honours the significant importance of locating my

self within my research by leaving space for my own storytelling to be intertwined with literature.

Indigenous Storywork Methodology
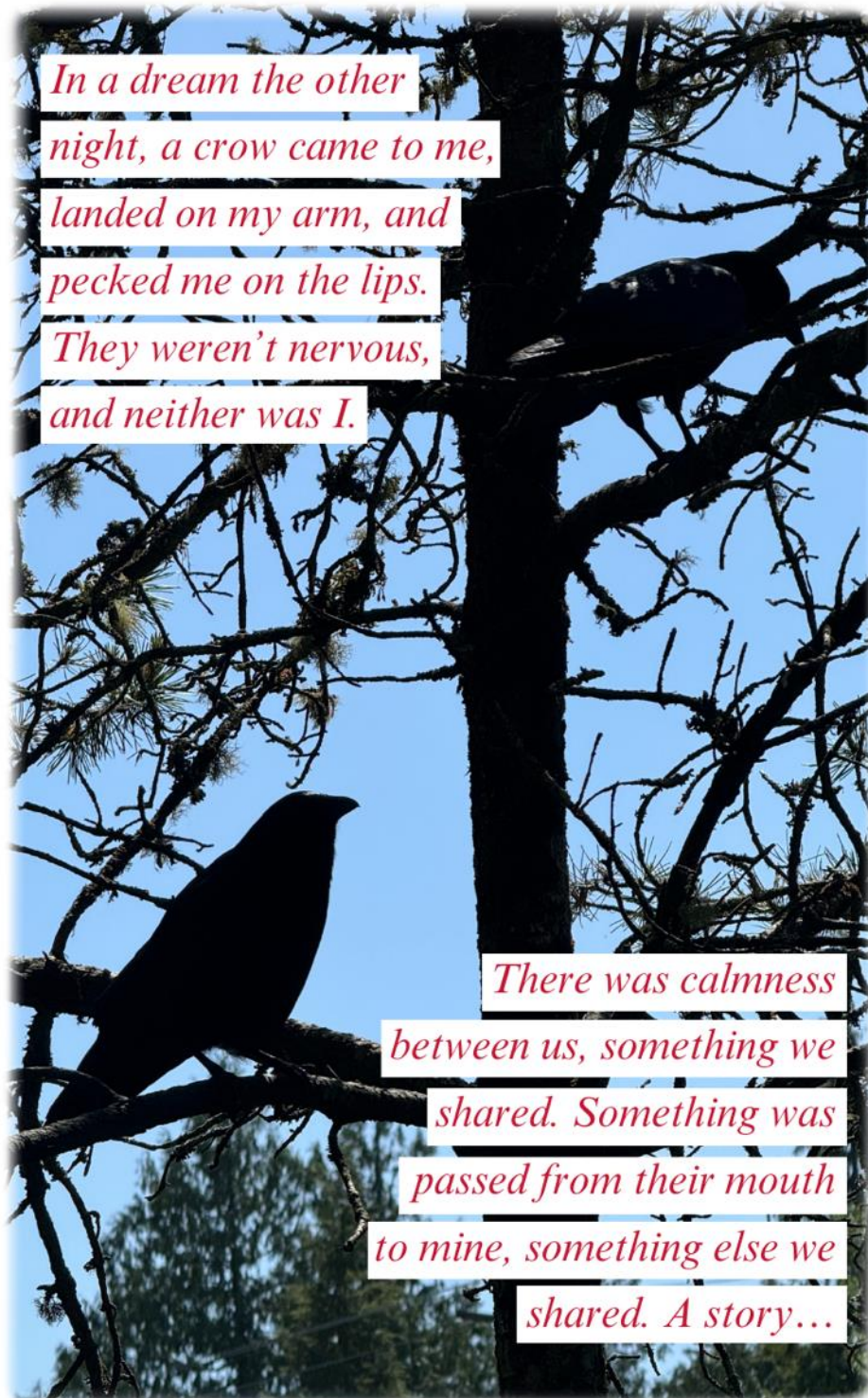
In a dream the other night, a crow came to me, landed on my arm, and pecked me on the lips. They weren't nervous, and neither was I.

There was calmness between us, something we shared. Something was passed from their mouth to mine, something else we shared. A story…

Powerful outcomes arise from the sharing of stories (Archibald, 2008; Berryman et al., 2013; Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Wright Cardinal, 2017). Margaret Kovach (2009) writes, "stories remind us of who we are and of our belonging" (p.94). In an effort to remind myself of who I am and where I belong, I share stories and memories from my childhood, educational journey, and practice throughout my thesis, weaving them together with relevant literature. To engage in storywork, I allowed myself to remember, revisit and re-engage with memories, dreams and stories from my childhood until the present. Doing so grounded my individual experience in a collective experience, reminding me of where I come from and where I belong.

The connection between storyteller and witnesses to stories is integral to the impact of storytelling as a form of research. Storytelling has always played a central role in Indigenous political and social frameworks (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2016). Underlying Indigenous research storytelling methodologies are the foundational components of self-determination and the commitment to decolonize as a process and a movement (McIvor, 2010). My intention in using a storytelling methodology has been to seek guidance, gain inspiration, and find critical language to describe the core components of my decolonial praxis and explain their importance and meaning. Given that I am using a critical lens, it is essential that my methodology includes continuously self-locating my responsibilities to embrace decolonizing practices, question colonial ideologies and discourses, and participate in transformative pedagogies and approaches (Wright Cardinal, 2017).

Storywork enacts sacred Indigenous protocols of speaking one's story as a vital political and social role and responsibility (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2016). Archibald

(2008) shares how Indigenous storywork encourages storytellers, story listeners and learners, researchers, and educators to better pay attention and engage with Indigenous stories for meaningful education and research. As a methodology, Indigenous storywork allows our communities to voice, listen to, and understand our stories with respect, reverence, reciprocity, and responsibility (Archibald, 2008). In a methodological context, the four principals of respect, reverence, reciprocity, and responsibility act as an ethical guide for the researcher to work with Indigenous people, their Indigenous knowledges, and their stories (Q'um q'um xiiem, et al., 2019; Thomas, 2000). By using storywork methodology, I am honoring my ancestors and our traditions. Indigenous storywork seeks to reclaim our abilities to story-talk, story-listen, story-learn and story-teach, and rectify the damage done by western research (Q'um q'um xiiem, et al., 2019). Storywork is a powerful political tool to redress history by telling and honoring our experiences with our own voice (Thomas, 2000). Therefore, I have used storywork in my methodological weaving to educate and heal the heart, mind, body and spirit, weaving together deep interrelational understandings of story, people and place (Archibald, 2008).

As part of Kinship Rising's arts-based, multi-media methodological approach (de Finney, Bennett, et al., 2021), I have complemented my stories with photographic collages. These illustrate my personal stories and memories, and document components of my reclamation journey. Photographic collages of my weaving projects, land-based materials, my journey home, education, activism, childhood, and crows/ravens, among others, are woven together with text. The photographic collages provide a visual representation of the themes I explore in my thesis; they serve to locate my body, self and history in my storytelling methodology through a visual, multi-media component. To

gather these materials, I went back and found photos from throughout my life. I also took new photos to document the phases of my research, such as learning to weave, going home, and putting on and wearing my headband. Additional photos of guides and teachers that support my storywork are included, such as stones, water, and cedar. I weave my storywork throughout my thesis in red italic font. I wanted my storywork to stand out, and I chose a colour that I believe represents my heart work.

My storywork has been changing, growing, and evolving alongside my own identity and self-location, as this research project is as much of a living and breathing entity as I am. Used as a research method, relational storytelling requires "a telling and listening that is intense, and intentional. Giving, receiving, giving—it makes a complete circle of Indigenous truth" (Brant, 1994, p. 19). My thesis journey has definitely not been linear; it has been circular, moving back and forth, around and around as I have navigated these complex memories, questions, and commitments along the way.

Locating Self in Storywork Research as Heart Work

In Indigenous relational praxis, self-location is necessary so that we can determine what our roles will be and how we will participate in decolonizing practices (Wright Cardinal, 2017). Kathy Absolon and Cam Willett (2004) discuss the importance of locating ourselves within our writing and research as a form of heart work, as it holds us accountable.

A heart work perspective and a focus on self-location are central to an Indigenous storytelling methodology. These methods have heavily influenced the way that I view myself both within my professional practice and in research and academia. Scott Kouri (2010) discusses self as a way of being, self as the essence of the helping relationship,

and how, in order to be effective in practice, one must be able to articulate and locate self. Thandiwe Dee Watts-Jones (2010) refers to self as situated personhood, which includes our interconnectedness with the legacies of culture, oppression, familial themes, meanings, and patterns of interactions, that influence psychological and relational being. As part of my self-location, I center traditional teachings of oneness, respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (Atleo, 2008) in my research and praxis, and I use Indigenous, social justice, and feminist lenses to critically analyze systems of power, oppression, and colonial violence (Coon, 2014; Lawrence, 2004; Q'um q'um xiiem, et al., 2019; Simpson, 2011, 2014; Watts-Jones, 2010; Wright-Cardinal, 2017). Disclosing my personal intersecting identities, such as culture, ethnicity, gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, allows me to situate myself within an ethical, relational context in my work (Q'um q'um xiiem, et al., 2019; Thomas, 2000; Watts-Jones, 2010).

Strengths and Limitations of a Storywork Methodology

When I take a moment to think of everyone who has contributed to my life, to my upbringing, to my knowledge, my thesis, and my praxis, I am committed to honouring their contributions to my research through reciprocity (Wilson, 2008). My research ethics require me to give back to the community, honouring our sacred teachings around generosity (Brown, 2008), even if just one other practitioner finds benefit in my work. I am mindful of the ethical tensions I hold around ownership and the right to share my story, as it is so tightly woven around the stories of those who have influenced me and even those of others whose stories are similar to mine. I share a common struggle of feeling like I am not in a position to be talking about tradition, culture, or language as an urban, mixed-race, and culturally removed Indigenous person with white privilege.

Alysha Brown (2008) reminds me that although "I am constantly humbled by these feelings of unworthiness . . . at the end of the day, I have realized though, it is my story and that is all. It has worth" (p. 42).

In adopting an arts-based storywork methodology, it is important to locate my ethics related to sharing stories and knowledge. When I speak of culture, connectedness, and reclamation, I am talking about the elements of my own journey (Brown, 2008; Wilson, 2008). Although I share them in my thesis, these knowledges and stories do not only belong to me, because Indigenous knowledge does not exist in isolation; it is woven and braided together with all our relations (Wilson, 2008). I ensured that all knowledge I share has been cited and referenced appropriately, giving credit to those who have helped pave the way. I have received permission from my family to use any stories and photos that relate to them.

I must also honour my responsibility to my grandmothers and grandfathers, and to all of my relations within my research, by not embellishing my stories to any degree, and following as closely as I can to the truth (Thomas, 2005; Wilson, 2001). Due to my stories being so personal and individual, I ensured I followed a lengthy process of writing and rewriting, checking to make sure that I found a balance between writing in a way that will be impactful and helpful to others, while being as completely honest as possible. Receiving permission from my family was important to me, honouring the way that our stories are woven together.

Onowa McIvor (2010) shares the importance of *nudity* within reclamation research, meaning that one must be willing to expose oneself by sharing private and intimate details of one's spirit, being open to the possibility of compassion, kindness, and

greater levels of understanding. A potential risk of being so vulnerable and exposed within my work is the opportunity to be scrutinized, judged, and critiqued by others (Ellis, 2004). This does not always feel easy in an academic setting, where Western academia expects us "to be in control and keep your private life removed from your professional life" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 755). Given the tightly woven nature of my stories with others', I have been careful and respectful to only share what is necessary in order to be honest in my truth and my experiences.

Because of my intentional decision to center storywork and myself in my research, what I share in my thesis is targeted, specific, and based on my own experiences in the world (Brown, 2008). Those who are used to more Western scientific or academic methodologies may view the fact that only my voice is being captured within my research as a limitation (Brown, 2008), although other scholars share work that contradicts this view (Absolon, 2018; Archibald, 2008; Thomas, 2005). Qwul'sih'yah'magt Robina Thomas (2000) challenges the critiques that question the validity of storytelling by reminding us that "First Nations people come from an oral society" (p. 21). By storytelling in our own voice, as Indigenous people we are honouring and respecting our ancestors and traditional ways of knowing, doing, and being.

Chapter 3: Weaving…

The following five thematic strands represent my woven approach to developing and embodying my decolonial praxis as an urban Indigenous CYC practitioner with white privilege.

Strand 1: Colonial Disconnection and Identity

Mixed Race and "Playing Indian"

Indigenous practitioners often share the experience of loss of identity, belonging, and connection to culture, which significantly impacts our lives and contributes to our choice to enter helping fields (Brown, 2008). This experience is especially salient for me, as I live with whiteness and have white privilege. The shame and guilt I carry around my identity is a direct result of internalized racism and intentional colonial assimilation tactics (Bazemore-James & Boyd, 2021; Brown, 2008). I am not alone in my experience of having my history and cultural identity stolen, whitewashed, or conveniently forgotten (Coon, 2014; Vowel, 2016). As an urban, mixed-race Indigenous woman with white privilege, I have had to contend with the harmful colonial narratives about what it means to be "Indigenous" and more specifically an Indigenous woman, and with feeling as though I do not fit the stereotypical models of Indigeneity that we have been reduced to in dominant western media. I have experienced a disconnected sense of belonging, living in a polarized society where the complexities of whiteness, urbanization, gender and Indigeneity are not widely discussed as existing in the same person (Lawrence, 2004; Vowel, 2016). I have struggled with comparing myself to the dominant images and narratives of what it means to be an Indigenous woman. Sandrina de Finney (2015)

analyzes how Indigenous girls, particularly in hipster culture, are hyper-sexualized and commodified as inherently mystical, natural, and spiritual, which Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2010, as cited by de Finney, 2015) termed *playing Indian*. The absence of authentic representations of Indigenous women and their realities reflected in dominant western media narrative leaves young Indigenous women with a lack of role models and representations of Indigenous leadership and sovereignty (de Finney, 2015). Growing up with my primarily white family in a city, disconnected from my culture due to intentional colonial disruption, and as someone who looks unequivocally white, I have had to overcome what I see as significant contradictions to claiming my birthright as an Indigenous woman (Lawrence, 2004). Shame, objectification, internalized racism, delegitimization, and real pain exist within my understanding of the legacy of abuse and oppression that is woven into my Indigenous identity (Vowel, 2016). It has been really challenging not to feel as though I am "playing Indian" myself.

Colonial Disconnection

In order for me to gain coverage for counselling through my status card, my counsellor asked me via email if any of the following were applicable: former Indian residential school student, family member of a former Indian residential school student, former Indian day school student, or family member of a former Indian day school student. Names of school attended. And, if the client is seeking services regarding the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, please describe. I followed up with an email containing the applicable information. They replied, "I will submit this information." Information. No acknowledgment of this information. I am left adding this exchange of "information" to the long list of colonial harms I have experienced.

A long list of colonial policies have harmed and disrupted Indigenous identity foundations (Wright Cardinal, 2017), such as the residential school system and forced removal of Indigenous children from their families during the Sixties and Millennial Scoops; theft of lands, culture, and language; legalized discrimination against Indigenous women, and; failures in equity in health, education and social funding, among many others. These policies have resulted in internalized racism, high rates of poverty, under-housing and urbanization, and isolation within communities, including mainstream society (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Sinclair, 2007). Generations of Indigenous people have faced genocidal violence through the institutions of a society determined to erase their Nativeness (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Lawrence, 2004; Sinclair, 2007). Indian Act violence has layered our genealogy with physical, emotional, and sexual violence, displacement, enfranchisement, gendered and patriarchal discrimination, injustices, and racism (Coon, 2014). While all of these colonial policies have impacted my family and community, I am choosing to focus on a select few that have notably shaped my Nuu-chah-nulth identity. As an urban Indigenous woman with white privilege, part of my ethic of accountability includes being critically reflective on the ways that colonial policies have impacted me; it also involves not co-opting harms I have not experienced due to the white privilege I hold in a white supremacist society. My understanding of these colonial policies comes from my experiences, family stories, and relevant literature on residential schools, incarceration, gendered violence, and urbanization.

Residential schools. Government legislators stated that the purpose of residential schools was assimilation of Indigenous people into the dominant society; the policy was

enforced by representatives of churches and by federal Indian agents (Lafrance & Collins, 2003). Indigenous children were forcefully "educated" separately from both their own culture and dominant society. In these culturally and geographically isolated settings, the systemic and formalized transmission of the dominant society's values, skills, culture, religion, and language took place, often through significant abuse (Lafrance & Collins, 2003). Children who were taken and forced to attend residential schools were subjected to starvation, incarceration, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, and prolonged separation from their families and communities (BraveHeart, 1999), and many experienced corporal punishment for speaking their language (Lafrance & Collins, 2003).

During the writing of my thesis, I attended a gathering for Ahousaht members living in and around Greater Victoria that brought together families and community members to remotely listen to a live update from Ahousaht on the research being done to locate unmarked graves at Ahousaht and Christie residential schools. Ahousaht Residential School was located on Flores Island; it operated from 1904 to 1940 and was run by the United Church from 1925. Christie Residential School was located on Meares Island and was operated by the Roman Catholic Church from 1900 to 1971 (Times Colonist, April 11, 2024). I am a granddaughter and great-granddaughter of residential school survivors.

This form of colonial violence, separating children from their families, communities, and culture, has had a long-lasting impact on almost all Indigenous families, even those who never attended residential schools themselves. Combined with the trauma endured in residential schools, the structure, cohesion, and quality of

Indigenous family and community life have been drastically impacted as parenting skills were intentionally ruptured, creating intergenerational impacts that include high rates of poverty, loss of status, substance use, and premature death, all sanctioned under the Indian Act (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Lafrance & Collins, 2003).

Incarceration. Despite only making up approximately 5% of the population, Indigenous people account for 32% of all individuals in custody in Canada, which means their incarceration rate is ten times higher than for non-Indigenous individuals (Macdonald, 2016). In a Statistics Canada report completed between 2019-2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023), it was reported that almost one in ten Indigenous men aged 25-34 years old experienced incarceration over this period. The overincarceration of Indigenous people is linked to systemic discrimination, economic and social disadvantage, substance use, the loss of intergenerational connections, violence, trauma, overpolicing (MacCarthy, 2023; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996) and the ongoing intergenerational legacy of residential schools (MacCarthy, 2023).

Research suggests that Indian Act colonial policies have displaced Indigenous fathers within families and taken away their roles as protectors and providers (Ball & Moselle, 2013; Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc., 2015; Manaham & Ball, 2007). Indigenous fathers are faced with increased rates of violence, racism, social isolation, family challenges, poverty, unemployment, lack of opportunities (Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc., 2015), and addiction (Mussell, 2005). The challenges that stem from colonial government interventions that Indigenous fathers face have undoubtedly created obstacles in sustaining positive relationships with their children (Ball, 2009; Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc.,

2015), which has been widely interpreted as indicating indifferent attitudes regarding

their father roles (Claes & Clifton 1998; Mussell, 2005).

This misguided narrative around Indigenous fathers' indifference towards their

relationship with their children is a colonial harm deeply embedded in my own

experience. As I share later in my thesis, a lot of my learning around colonialism took

place in school, leaving my youngest self without any context or understanding of what

my family -and my dad specifically- has endured. In an attempt to provide comfort, I was

often told as a child that it was not my fault that I did not always have the connection

with my dad's Indigenous family that I longed for. Although this was well intended, a

missing component of this narrative was that it was not my family's fault either.

Gendered violence. Indigenous women are being physically erased and

eliminated in colonial society (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous

Women and Girls, 2019). This erasure is a

direct result of settler colonialism intentionally

working to efficiently remove Indigenous people

from their territories to prevent reclamation of those

territories (Lawrence, 2004; Simpson, 2014). Eve

Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012) highlight how the

intentional disruption of Indigenous relationships to

land is a form of epistemic, ontological and

cosmological violence deeply implicated in, and

generative of, colonial gender-based violence, a

violence steeped in constructions of Indigenous
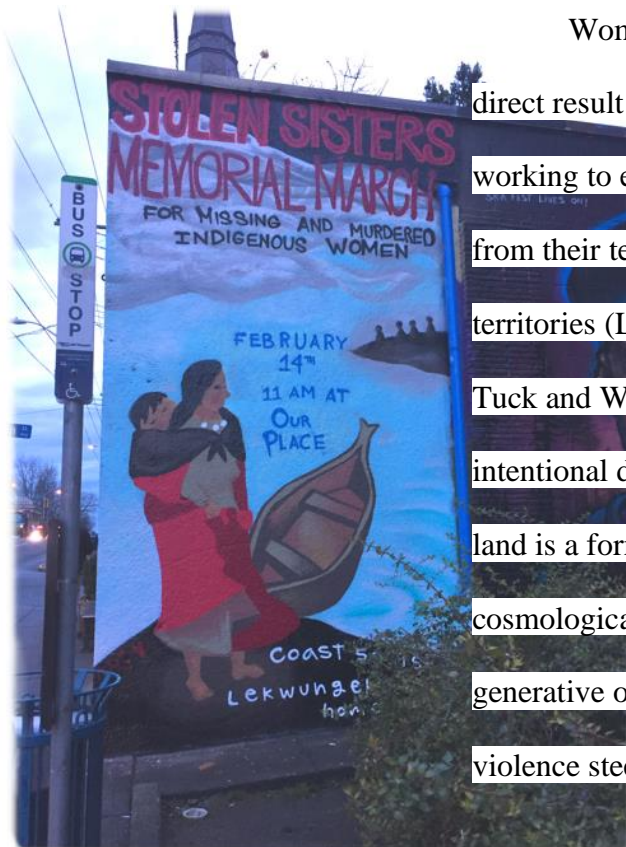
women as romanticized versions of colonial property; disposable and ungrievable (de

Finney, 2015).

At the same time that Indigenous women and non binary, 2Spirit folks were being

legally and socially marginalized from leadership roles in their own communities, the

same Indian Act policies that deprived First Nations mothers of their status and forced

them to live with their husbands in white society enabled the white wives of status Indian

men to enter Indigenous communities with full status (Lawrence, 2004; National Inquiry

into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019). The result is that

generations of First Nations women lost their right to live and raise children in their

communities, which not only supported an epidemic of gendered violence, but also led to

high rates of urbanization (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous

Women and Girls, 2019). Being deliberately separated from my Indigenous community

and land that hold my history has ruptured my knowledge about my past; many who have

been separated from their birthrights and forcefully urbanized experience a profound

sense of alienation and deep levels of ambiguity and discomfort about their Native

identity (Lawrence, 2004).

Urbanization. *I remember being out along the Victoria waterway with my little brother and my father when I was younger. It was summer and the sun was warm. We were walking around and came across a huge blackberry bush. We stuck our arms through the wired fence that surrounded them. When we had plucked all of the blackberries we could reach, my father climbed over*

the fence to get us more berries. My brother and I were scared that he was going to get in trouble,

and we urged him to climb back over to us. My father scoffed and told us that this was all Indian land, and that he could pick his kids berries anywhere he wanted. I did not know what this meant at the time, as I was only four or five years old. But I remember how I felt hearing him say that. I knew it meant something significant.

The intention and impact of settler colonialism is to contain Indigenous bodies and land into colonial categories (Hokulani et al., 2015), which creates dichotomies of un/belonging that are used to control and monitor Indigenous peoples (Coon, 2014). Bonita Lawrence's (2004) analysis about the damaging impacts of forced urbanization resonate with me; urban Indigeneity is complicated, as I feel utterly disconnected from core components of myself as a Nuu-chah-nulth person, given that I was removed from our traditional lands through the colonial tactic of urbanization. Learning how to connect to, hold onto, and center parts of myself that are far away from me has been a focus of my reclamation journey, which later in the thesis I share through my storywork and photographic collages from my recent trip to Ahousaht for the first time in my life.

Renee Linklater (2014) discusses how Indigenous worldviews are evolving and expanding to account for urban, mixed-race Indigenous young people with white privilege whose lives, like mine, are shaped by neocolonial effects and who are always living in the in-between. This speaks to the need for our unique storywork to be made

more visible, accepted and accessible in our own communities and beyond. We need

nuanced stories of identity and reclamation that eschew simplistic accounts of what it

means to be an urban, mixed-race Indigenous person with white privilege in a

contemporary settler state.

Disconnected identity.

        During my literature review, I realized that my own experiences of dislocation

and disconnection are common, especially among other Indigenous people from my

generation who are also urban, mixed-race with white privilege. I have oscillated between

excitement about my reclamation journey, and feeling heartbroken about the unfairness

of what colonialism has taken from me. Reclaiming my identity has involved confronting

a profound sense of loss and pain that comes along with the realization that for all of my

life, colonial policies and narratives have intentionally disrupted my connection to my

culture, my community, and my homeland (Coon, 2014; Lawrence, 2004; Linklater,

2014). Disconnection from my Indigenous identity has also resulted in a tremendous

burden of isolation, shame, and anger (de Finney, 2015). For those of us who have light skin, who grew up urban or away from community and with our non-Indigenous parents, without access to culture and teachings, claiming Indigenous identity is a conflicting experience. Much like Brown (2008), I am "motivated by my sense of disconnection and a desire for better outcomes, not only for myself but for all Indigenous children and families and future generations" (p. 30).

Through my storywork and heart work, I have gained a deeper understanding of my positionality and how my identity has been informed and impacted by the colonial landscape I live in. Having this understanding allows me to situate myself within a broader context of colonial systems of power, violence and gain, gathering knowledge and insight into how this shapes the decolonial work that is appropriate and necessary for me to embody. In my next strand, I weave together my experiences of colonial disconnection with my educational and academic experiences.

Strand 2: Educational and Academic Experiences

When I was a child, I knew I was First Nations because I was added to an Aboriginal student list at school every year. I cannot recall having any deep understanding of what this meant, other than that once a month, I was invited over the morning announcements to an Aboriginal student lunch. I never attended.

Once when I was in third grade, it was cultural appreciation day at my school and students were invited to wear their cultural clothes or bring cultural items to school. I remember asking my mom to google what a traditional First Nations outfit was. I did not wear any of the suggested items.

The same year, I did a project on First Nations in British Columbia. I made a model of a longhouse, with brown-skinned figurines with long black hair and red shawls over their shoulders. I included a write-up on traditional building structures. I did not make the connection that I was researching my own family's traditions.

I remember filling out a form for school that asked what First Nations band I belonged to. Having no idea what this meant, I phoned my dad and he spelled out Nuu-chah-nulth over the phone to me. This was the first time I truly felt a connection to another part of myself.

In grade 10, a white teacher told me about First Nations scholarships I could apply for when I went to postsecondary, and that through my band I could use my status card to access funding to help pay for my postsecondary education. My status card, something I had never looked at.

When I was in grade 11, I took a BC First Nations social studies class. Every week we had to bring in articles we found online or in newspapers pertaining to Indigenous topics. I found an article about high incarceration rates of Indigenous men. When it was my turn to read the article out loud to the class, I was flooded with emotion at the realization this article was talking about stats that included my family members. I did not read the article out loud and took 0% on the assignment. In the same class, I learned about residential schools. I learned of the abuse, neglect, and violence that Indigenous children were subjected to while at these schools. I learned the date of the closure of the last residential school. Through this, I learned who in my family would have attended residential schools. I left the class crying.

The summer after grade 11, my school counsellor registered me for an Indigenous student summer camp at university. I spent a week on campus with Indigenous students from all over the province. All of our camp leaders were Indigenous students. I met several leaders who were Nuu-chah-nulth, who knew my family and spoke with me about our culture. I told them I didn't know anything about my culture, and they told me it was in my blood this whole time. I made my first drum at this

summer camp. When I got home from camp, I applied for postsecondary funding through my band, using my status card. I enrolled in an Indigenous-focused program and I cried.

On my first day of postsecondary, one of my teachers turned out to be one of my aunties. Having met me once when I was a young child, she recognized me right away, exclaiming how much I looked like my father, her younger cousin. I was thrilled to be learning about academics as well as learning about my own family and my identity.

When I entered the second year of my diploma program, my Indigenous cohort was mixed with the rest of the students in the cohort. We were questioned by some of the students about the classes we got to skip because we had taken the "Indigenous equivalent" the year before. We were told these classes were easier and that we had it easier. The same students sat around me and said nothing as a teacher made a racist comment about how suicide rates and lacrosse player rates were the same among Indigenous people. Turns out the other students were right: My Indigenous equivalent classes were easier—easier to bear.

When I transferred to university to finish my undergraduate degree, I re-entered academic spaces that were Indigenous focused. I took the Indigenous specialization classes, connected with Indigenous students and Indigenous faculty. Most importantly, I connected to my Indigenous identity.

Academic institutions in Canada have a long legacy of inflicting harm against Indigenous students (Mitchell et al., 2018), a legacy that is discussed further in the following section. While this legacy of harm is woven through my academic journey, I have nonetheless found strands of healing and reclamation in my educational and academic experiences. In their book *Indigenous Identity Formation in Postsecondary*

Institutions: I Found Myself in the Most Unlikely Place, Barbara Barnes and Cora Voyageur (2020) followed 60 Indigenous students of varying backgrounds at several different postsecondary institutions in Canada and explored what role postsecondary education played in the formation of their Indigenous identity. The participants in their study experienced postsecondary education as strengthening, affirming, or supporting their Indigenous identity; they reported gaining a sense of understanding and insight into their identity through both negative and positive experiences (Barnes & Voyageur, 2020).

Most noted that positive experiences included learning about Indigenous history, culture, ceremonies, and rituals, specifically in Indigenous courses. Coursework increased participants' awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the world around them, and in some instances provided insight about their own lives, behaviour, and other aspects of themselves and their identities. Students also reported feeling empowered seeing other Indigenous students succeeding. Professors also had an impact on students' Indigenous identity, specifically those who were inspiring, provided viewpoints that confirmed identity, and encouraged focus and fine-tuning of interests.

Across the memories and stories that I share, it becomes clear that integral moments where I learned about my Indigenous identity occurred in educational institutions. Both positive and negative experiences in my education journey have played a role in me understanding and gaining insight into my Indigenous identity. While the recognition and exploration of my journey in understanding my Indigenous identity is not new to me, Barnes and Voyageur (2020) have given me a new perspective. My story, and the story of other Indigenous students finding themselves in an educational setting, is not that uncommon at all.

Sarah Wright Cardinal's doctoral research (2017) explored pathways to reclaim Indigenous identity for students who have been raised outside of their communities. Wright Cardinal identifies four initial pathways to identity reconnection: meeting Indigenous people; tapping into Aboriginal services and programs; jobs in Indigenous organizations; and Indigenous courses/programs at university. Through these social, educational, and employment experiences, students are introduced to the colonial history of Canada, the diversity of Indigenous Nations, and the socio-political issues that Indigenous people experience.

Throughout my academic journey, I engaged in the initial pathways Wright Cardinal (2017) proposes. These brought up emotions that required tending to, including working through the shock and anger of first learning about the history and genocide of Indigenous peoples, making sense of my white privilege and Indigenous identity, working through imposter feelings, and going through my own grief work and reclamation journey around loss of identity and culture. All of these shared experiences that have caused an internal conflict and a disrupted sense of self and belonging for urban, mixed-race Indigenous students with white privilege are direct and intentional effects of colonial tactics (Bazemore-James & Boyd, 2021).

Indigenizing Academia

Canada has committed cultural violence through oppressive legislation and colonial institutions, including educational settings that fail to honor and support Indigenous peoples' histories, rights, and cultural worldviews (Mitchell et al., 2018). The Indian Act of 1876 dictated that status Indians could not pursue a university degree unless they revoked their Indian status (Stonechild, 2006). Although this dictum does not still

stand, there are plenty of accounts of racism in academic institutions presently. These include but are not limited to the expectation that Indigenous students conform to Western norms (Debassige & Brunette-Debassige, 2018), the denial of agency in knowledge making (Debassige & Brunette-Debassige, 2018), micro aggressions and stereotypes about Indigenous peoples (Clark et al., 2014; Currie et al., 2012), and erasure or misrepresentation via curriculum (Bailey, 2016; Clark et al., 2014).

Although academic institutions have long been sites of racism, learning and growth also occur within them (Efimoff, 2022). The process of Indigenization is deeply interconnected with decolonization (Blair et al., 2020; Debassige & Brunette-Debassige, 2018; Fellner, 2018; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; George, 2019; Grafton & Melançon, 2020; Madden & Glanfield, 2019; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Ottmann, 2013). Indigenization has been described both as a process of embedding Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being within academic institutions, and as increasing the success of Indigenous students (Bédard, 2018; Blair et al., 2020; Bopp et al., 2017; Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2016; Compton, 2016; Debassige & Brunette-Debassige, 2018; Efimoff, 2019; Fiola & MacKinnon, 2020; FitzMaurice, 2011; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kinzel, 2020; Newhouse, 2016; Ottmann, 2013; Pidgeon, 2014, 2016; Poitras Pratt et al., 2018). Though Indigenization efforts have been underway for many years (Kuokkanen, 2008; Lavallee, 2020; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004), they have expanded rapidly in recent years as Canadian postsecondary institutions work to respond to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada around Indigenization (Bédard, 2018; Debassige & Brunette-Debassige, 2018; Fiola & MacKinnon, 2020; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

Iloradanon Efimoff (2022) completed a study at the University of Saskatchewan that included 10 Indigenous students, highlighting their experiences and engagement with Indigenization at academic institutions with the intent of informing Indigenization policies. Through their engagement with Indigenization, participants shared stories of experiencing personal and professional growth; gaining skills or experience in public speaking, mentorship, event facilitation, and community building; and affirming effects on their identity development. It was noted that Indigenous student programming was successful in supporting students to feel comfortable, forge relationships, access opportunities, and provide a safe(r) space where students felt they could be authentic and safe from racism.

Participants also spoke to the importance of centering Indigenous values such as spirituality, self-determination, future looking, culture, and community in academic institutions, and expressed how important Indigenization was in creating an environment where Indigenous students could reconnect to Indigenous culture. Elders have been cited as powerful contributors to positive educational experiences for Indigenous students, as Elders contribute to opportunities for students to learn about themselves and their histories, cultural knowledge, and oral traditions (Robinson, 2023), Indigenization, and self-decolonization (Efimoff, 2022). Academic supervisors and mentors can further develop and support students' cultural resurgence and identity journeys (Efimoff, 2022).

While there is value in having representations of Indigeneity in academic institutions (Robinson, 2023), tokenism, appropriation and paternalism are problematic within Indigenization processes (Efimoff, 2022). Indigenous authors involved in Indigenization efforts have documented feeling frustrated by seemingly ineffective or

tokenistic processes such as adding Indigenous art to physical spaces (Lavallée, 2020), being treated as token Indigenous persons at events or in projects (Bédard, 2018; Lavallée, 2020), a lack of system change (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), or the expectation that Indigenous students and faculty in postsecondary education will do Indigenization work (Debassige & Brunette-Debassige, 2018; Fiola & MacKinnon, 2020; Grafton & Melançon, 2020; Lavallée, 2020).

Although participants in Efimoff's (2022) study described growing personally, professionally, and culturally through their engagement with Indigenization, they also reported experiencing poor physical and mental health, spending less time with family and community, and financial or social struggles, often due to feeling obligated to overcontribute to Indigenization. Participants described their sense of responsibility and desire to give back to their community, resulting in taking on extra Indigenization efforts that took away from their ability to secure paid work, focus on their academics, tend to their basic needs, and spend time with friends, family, and community (Efimoff, 2022). Many participants spoke of exhaustion from over-engagement with Indigenization efforts, the physical, emotional, and psychological work required, and the pressure to be the "voice" of Indigenous students (Efimoff, 2022). These findings align with many other Indigenous scholars' research findings about Indigenization overwork (Debassige & Brunette-Debassige, 2018; Fiola & MacKinnon, 2020; Grafton & Melançon, 2020; Lavallée, 2020). Despite these personal impacts, participants in these studies expressed their continued desire to be involved, represented and self-determined, and to continue challenging current systems and Indigenizing academic institutions.

By weaving my first strand of colonial disconnection and the impacts on my

Indigenous identity together with my academic experiences, I have gained invaluable insights into how colonialism has shaped my academic experiences. I have found common experiences in the literature that ground my storywork in a collective experience, breaking down shame and hurt I have carried for years. Having Indigenous focused post-secondary programs available to me connected me with academics, mentors, practitioners, and literature that inspired me to develop and embody decolonial ethics in my CYC praxis. My experiences of colonial disconnection and my academic experiences brought me to the place where I was able to think critically and in a decolonizing way about my CYC praxis ethics. In my next strand, I weave the ethics of unsettling settler practices and justice-doing together with the dilemmas I have faced in frontline practice.

Strand 3: Praxis Ethics

I have been singled out in meetings, workshops, and work environments, and have been reached out to via email, Instagram, and through mutual friends in community settings, and asked for my opinion, input, insight, and emotional labour around Indigenous, decolonial, social justice, and political topics. People share with me encounters they have had, incidents they witnessed, and ask for my opinion on their own engagement or thoughts on certain matters. This emotional labour has stirred up a multitude of complex feelings; feeling validated in my Indigenous identity that people would come to me; feeling the weight of the heaviness of providing this emotional labour to people; wondering about their lack of regard and consideration for what this does to my spirit and wellbeing; questioning if they think this emotional labour does not impact me because I am not "really Indigenous"; and then being filled with self-doubt regarding

my knowledge and insight on Indigenous matters, and if it is even my place to have an

opinion.

Unsettling Settler Practices
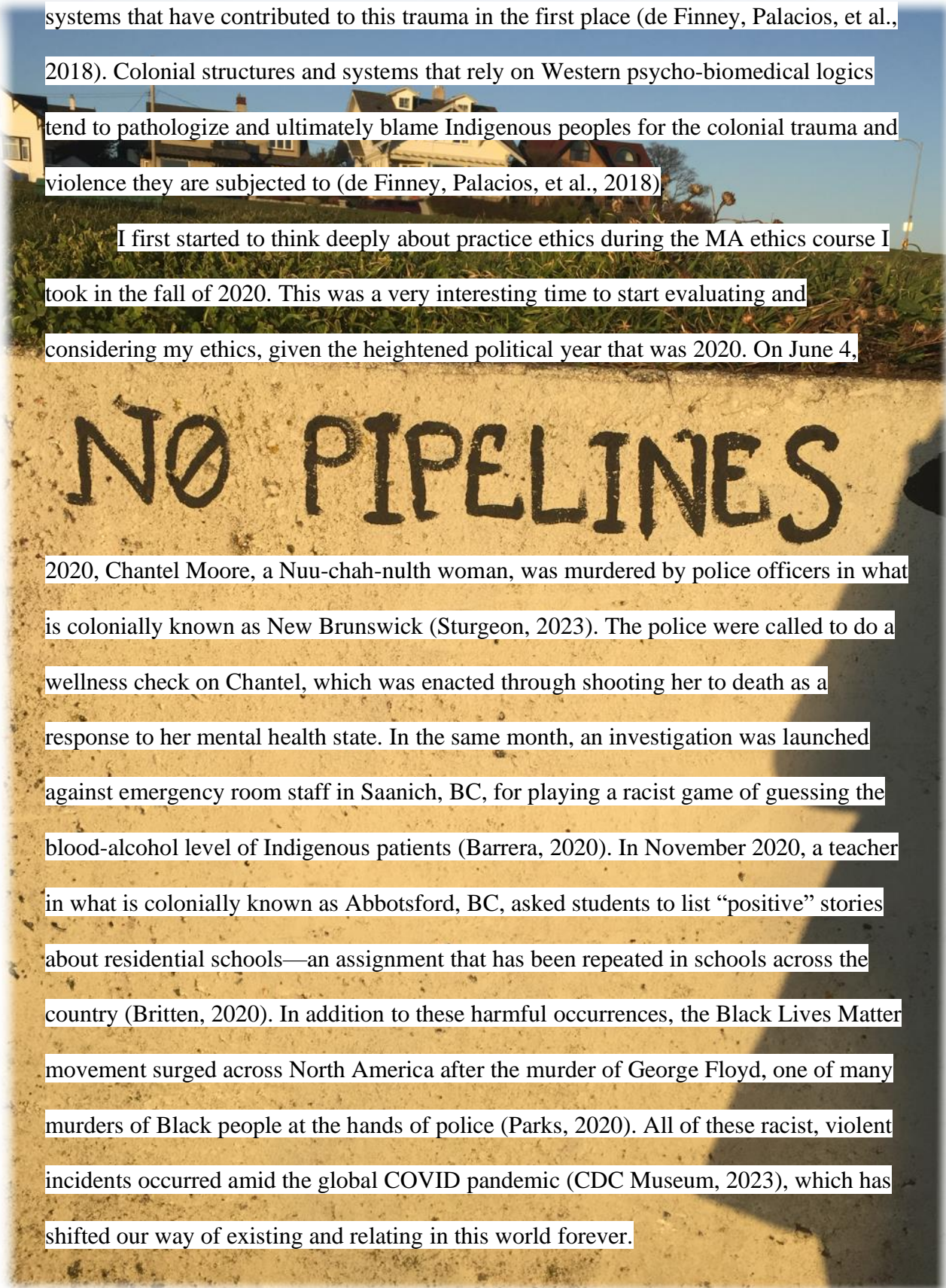
Across all social systems —whether it is in the CYC field, healthcare, education,

social services, or the criminal justice system— settler colonial beliefs actively harm

Indigenous people by perpetuating patterns of submission and domination (Mackenzie,

2019). As for the

CYC field, some

of the most

prominent harms

caused by settler

colonialism are the

legacies of

residential schools,

the Sixties Scoop,

and the current and

 ongoing Millennial

Scoop. Johanne Saraceno (2012, citing Foucault, 1975, Skott-Myhre, 2004, and Wade,

1995) states that settler colonial political beliefs are embedded in all contemporary

structures and systems in colonial Canada, including law, child welfare, education,

psychology, and health, making human service work inherently colonial. Due to the

inherent coloniality of these structures and systems, Indigenous children, youth, and

families who have experienced severe trauma are forced to turn to the same colonial

systems that have contributed to this trauma in the first place (de Finney, Palacios, et al., 2018). Colonial structures and systems that rely on Western psycho-biomedical logics tend to pathologize and ultimately blame Indigenous peoples for the colonial trauma and violence they are subjected to (de Finney, Palacios, et al., 2018)

I first started to think deeply about practice ethics during the MA ethics course I took in the fall of 2020. This was a very interesting time to start evaluating and considering my ethics, given the heightened political year that was 2020. On June 4, 2020, Chantel Moore, a Nuu-chah-nulth woman, was murdered by police officers in what is colonially known as New Brunswick (Sturgeon, 2023). The police were called to do a wellness check on Chantel, which was enacted through shooting her to death as a response to her mental health state. In the same month, an investigation was launched against emergency room staff in Saanich, BC, for playing a racist game of guessing the blood-alcohol level of Indigenous patients (Barrera, 2020). In November 2020, a teacher in what is colonially known as Abbotsford, BC, asked students to list "positive" stories about residential schools—an assignment that has been repeated in schools across the country (Britten, 2020). In addition to these harmful occurrences, the Black Lives Matter movement surged across North America after the murder of George Floyd, one of many murders of Black people at the hands of police (Parks, 2020). All of these racist, violent incidents occurred amid the global COVID pandemic (CDC Museum, 2023), which has shifted our way of existing and relating in this world forever.

Megan Bang (2020) views the pandemic and the protests as a time for new

possibilities and clarity around our ethical responsibilities to create a new world.

However, she cautions about the profoundly problematic reemergence and continued

moves towards white supremacy, right-wing nationalism, and individualism that are

sweeping the western world. According to Bang, our challenge to this shift must come

from our capacity for dreaming beyond past worlds defined by human supremacy, white supremacy, and the logics

of heteropatriarchal and capitalistic labour, extraction, domination, and erasure. Despite

these ever-persistent roadblocks to moving towards a future world where white

supremacy and the expendability and murderability of Indigenous, Black, and POC

bodies cease to exist, I, much like Bang, am "unwilling to succumb to the colonialities'

totalizing logics and claims" (2020, p. 440). I too believe this is a sacred time for

birthing, creating, possibility, imagining, and future making (Bang, 2020).

With this vision grounding my practice of unsettling settler logics, my ethical compass embodies Bang's (2020) mindset of this being a sacred time for change. My decolonial praxis echoes an ongoing call from Indigenous, Black, POC, queer, and trans voices for settler CYC practitioners to engage in a collective, politicized praxis (Loiselle et al., 2012; Moreno & Mucina, 2019) and for white settler CYC practitioners to "unsettle their settler privilege" (Mackenzie, 2019). These guiding ethics prompt me to continue moving forward in my own journey of developing and embodying a decolonial praxis as an urban Indigenous practitioner with white privilege.

Justice-doing in CYC Praxis

Justice-doing has always been a core component of my CYC praxis. I have intentionally sought out spaces that have allowed me to centre political action within my front line work. I have been fortunate enough to have supervisors that have allowed me to pause my usual duties to attend protests, solidarity marches, workshops, and events that tend to my cultural health. I appreciate the experiences I have had where I have been allowed to tend to my own wellbeing, and the acknowledgement of how this is deeply tied to my ability to show up in a good way, and do good work. I have felt respected, appreciated, and seen in my roles when I am allowed to show up as my authentic self, regardless of where I am in my identity journey.

During one of my UVic courses, we were having a discussion on Indigenous self-determination and decolonization in our field. At the same time, a solidarity movement

supporting Indigenous sovereignty was happening downtown and demonstrators urged students to engage in a walkout. Our class was aware of this, and several of us were planning on attending. The teacher was aware of the solidarity walk out, and informed us that if we missed the class discussion, we would receive 0% on the assignment. This was not the first time I took a 0% on an assignment to follow my ethics and values, and it wasn't the last.

Decolonization for Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners requires working together on projects that rethink the status quo and challenge structural oppression embedded in our societal processes and policies. It requires us to adopt practices that encourage critical thinking (Bang, 2020; Wright Cardinal, 2017) as a way of laying bare the colonial logics that govern us, and imagine other ways of being and doing. To engage in decolonization, we must be able to view our privileges, our actions, and ourselves within the world we live in, and imagine a new world with new ethics; this requires engaging in a praxis of action and reflection upon the world in order to transform its colonial inheritances (Freire, 1970; Wright Cardinal, 2017). Decolonization praxis is an active process of delegitimizing colonization (Wilson & Yellowbird, 2005). Decolonizing work requires self-reflexivity, as we have all been impacted by colonization (Wright Cardinal, 2017). A decolonial framework requires Indigenous people to "renew and reconstruct the principals underlying their own worldviews, environments, languages, and forms of communication, and re-examine how all of these elements combine to construct their humanity" (Battiste, 2005, p. 227). Decolonial Indigenous futures require new generations, however urbanized, to be able to walk in a good way on their sovereign homelands, surrounded by all their relations.

While I am doing my best to shift my praxis and walk in a "good way," it is important that I am gentle and compassionate with myself, as I am still a young person trying to find my own place in this world (Brown, 2008). Developing and embodying a truly decolonial praxis is hard and requires balancing my responsibilities as an Indigenous person with white privilege, a student, a frontline worker, and a young person remaining hopeful and optimistic about our futures. It can feel like a heavy load to work towards undoing hundreds of years of brutal systemic and political colonial violence, all while trying to support my self-determination, reclamation, and wellbeing and take care of my family.

Dilemmas in Decolonial Praxis

What does it mean to be an urban Indigenous practitioner with white privilege? What does this look like? What does this feel like? What do people expect of me? What do I expect of myself?

I head into my interview. They have interviewed me before. They know me. I feel confident I am a right fit for this job. I know my skills, my experience, my education, and the knowledge I hold. I feel confident.

They start the interview. They forget who I am. I awkwardly remind them they have interviewed me before. They apologize. I feel less confident. They emphasize the importance of being a cultural, Indigenous role model in this position. They ask me questions about my practice. They ask me what cultural components I can bring to this role. They ask me who my favourite elder is at the University of Victoria. I feel awkward explaining myself, as if I am already failing to meet their expectations of me. I leave the

interview feeling defeated. They don't know who I am. I am not a good fit. I am not a good Indigenous practitioner. I failed the interview. I failed the test.

I receive feedback immediately after my interview from the one Indigenous person who was on the panel. I am told that I did not introduce myself correctly, and they were looking for that. I don't recall anyone on the panel introducing themselves to me after they had forgotten who I am. I was told only one other person applied for the position, and that they were going to give it to me. No comments on if I was the right fit. I declined the position. They don't know who I am.

I am left feeling unsure about my experience. Holding "Indigenous specific" roles has always felt daunting to me, being torn between what others expect of me, what I expect of myself, and then what feels right for me. Do I have the right skill set? Is it right for this to be expected of me? Do I have imposter syndrome? Is this my internalized racism? Is this external racism? Are these colonial expectations? Am I expected to 'play Indian'? Do I feel like I am 'playing Indian' when I doubt my identity and myself? When is it right for me to step into my knowledge and birthright to practice cultural knowledge? When is it right for me to step aside, and create space for others who hold this knowledge deeper than I do?

I seek guidance from my supervisor. She shares with me that I have spent a lot of time developing my skills and expertise, and they are something to be celebrated as long as it is done in the right way. She shares I should trust my gut and make sure I am presenting my skills as a form of valuable expertise, as it is not just culture, it is a set of complex knowledge from our ancestors. She reminds me that it is my birthright to practice these things in the way I chose.

I talk to my auntie about my experience. I tell her my complex feelings about being Indigenous, and that I fear I don't know what it means to be Nuu-chah-nulth, and that I need to learn. She shares that there are a lot of different roles to hold, all equally important, and that I do not need to take them all on. She tells me that I am Quu'as'a.

Indigenous frontline workers are expected to provide "culturally safe" trauma-informed care when instead the emphasis needs to be on going beyond bandaid solutions for individualized care; what is really needed are resurgence-building interventions that focus on unsettling settler systems that colonize and harm our communities (de Finney, Palacios, et al., 2018). Echoing this call for unsettling settler systems, Cathy Richardson and Vikki Reynolds (2012) state that holding neutrality and objectivity in regards to social justice matters accommodates clients to private lives of hell, which does not align with any helping professional ethics. Richardson and Reynolds's stance on justice-doing helps to answer the question surrounding practitioners and front line workers holding settler colonial political beliefs outside of their practice when these beliefs actively uphold and enact colonial violence. By piecing together multiple voices calling for an unsettling of settler systems, an ethic of unsettling can emerge.

Although the need for decolonization has always been apparent to Indigenous, Black, and POC practitioners and scholars, there has been a recent uptake in calling for a decolonial approach in CYC (Bang, 2020; de Finney, Palacios, et al., 2018; Loiselle et al., 2012). The language of unsettling in CYC has emerged from multiple voices in the field calling for unsettling settler systems (de Finney, Palacios, et al., 2018), unsettling the white settler problem (Mackenzie, 2019), a move to ethical action (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012), and centering a praxis of solidarity and justice work (Saraceno, 2012).

The word *unsettling* speaks to the complex process of disrupting settler logics in the field. It includes naming and interrupting the discomfort and disturbance around white CYC practitioners acknowledging their privilege, the atrocities and genocidal history of Canada, the harm their occupancy of stolen land causes to Indigenous peoples, and their continued upholding of settler colonial political beliefs within the CYC field. While the process of unsettling can be incredibly difficult, not doing it is not an option (Loiselle et al., 2012): An ethic of unsettling has emerged as necessary for Indigenous, Black and POC wellbeing.

Yet, despite the mounting literature and discursive theorizing in CYC work encouraging an integration of decolonization and social justice in our practice (Laliberte, 2022; Mackenzie, 2019; Moreno & Mucina, 2019), there is a lack of consistent inclusion of this work in our field's professional codes of ethics, practice standards, and everyday practices (Loiselle et al., 2012). Indigenous
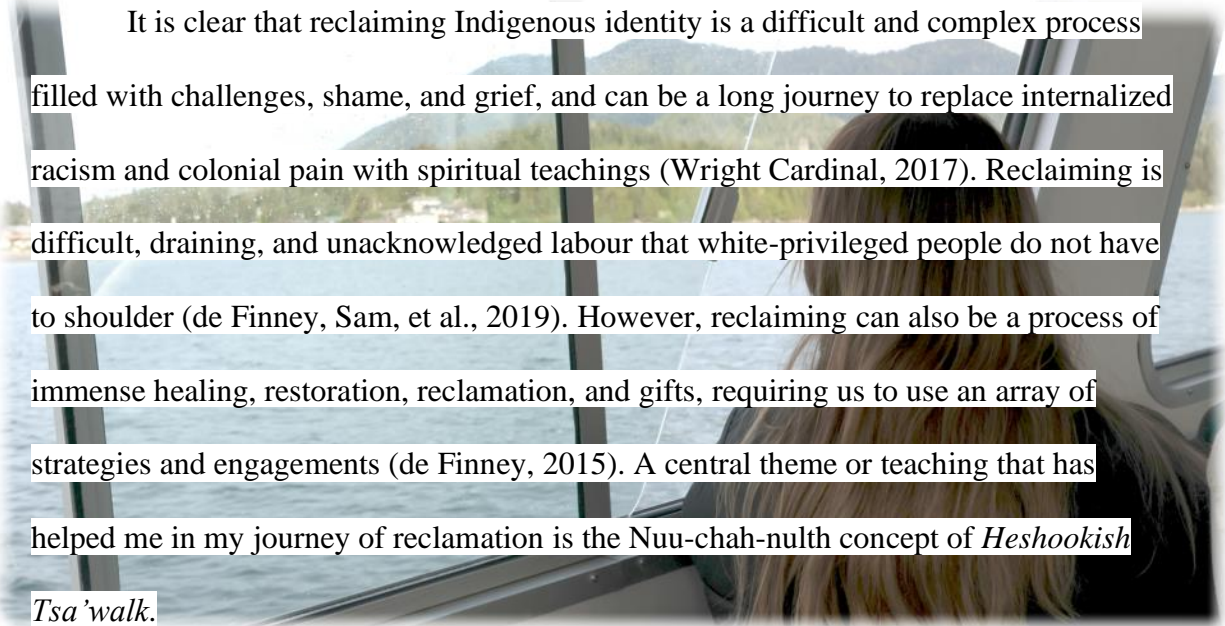
practitioners often find themselves in an intricate balance between having to follow

provincial standards, policy, and legislation, while simultaneously holding onto

traditional values and ways of being (Brown, 2008). Shantelle Moreno and Mandeep

Mucina (2019) write that "solidarity is not merely academic or imagined, but it is

intentionality enacted in our everyday interactions" (p. 99), while Richardson and

Reynolds (2012) further stress that "critical theory on its own cannot deliver a just

society. What matters is that we enact our ethics" (p. 7). While the literature and theory

are there, it seems as though social justice holds a peripheral position in our field

(Newbury, 2009). Much like what Richardson and Reynolds powerfully identify as

accommodating clients to private lives of hell, Janet Newbury (2009) states that helping

clients adjust to unjust situations is not an ethical practice on its own. The importance of

our interpersonal caring relationships (Newbury, 2009) must be partnered with collective

accountability (Reynolds, 2012), which demands that all practitioners and frontline

workers become social justice activists both in their work and in their lives (Reynolds,

2008).

　　　　In addition to a position of social justice, a decolonizing stance is needed in order

to begin unsettling conventional social and professional practices, as well as mapping a

new way to uncover, track, and resist their hegemonic normative values (Saraceno,

2012). The process of mapping out new, engaged methods of uncovering and resisting

coloniality compares similarly to the call that Kaz Mackenzie (2019) highlights for CYC

practitioners to not only respond individually but to expose dominant systems that

colonize and harm. Decolonization involves making everyday practical, political, and

economic choices that support the safety, wellbeing, integrity, and sovereignty of

Indigenous people (de Finney, Palacios, et al., 2018), as we cannot solely blame systems while sitting idly by (Moreno & Mucina, 2019). Mounting literature has called for decolonizing and social justice praxis to unsettle the explicit ways in which settler colonialism shapes the multiple forms of violence Indigenous peoples experience (Loiselle et al., 2012; Saraceno, 2012; de Finney, Palacios, et al., 2018). To follow the growing calls from Indigenous, Black and POC and critical allied scholars, I feel it is necessary, and ethically responsible, to include an unsettling ethic in my decolonizing praxis.
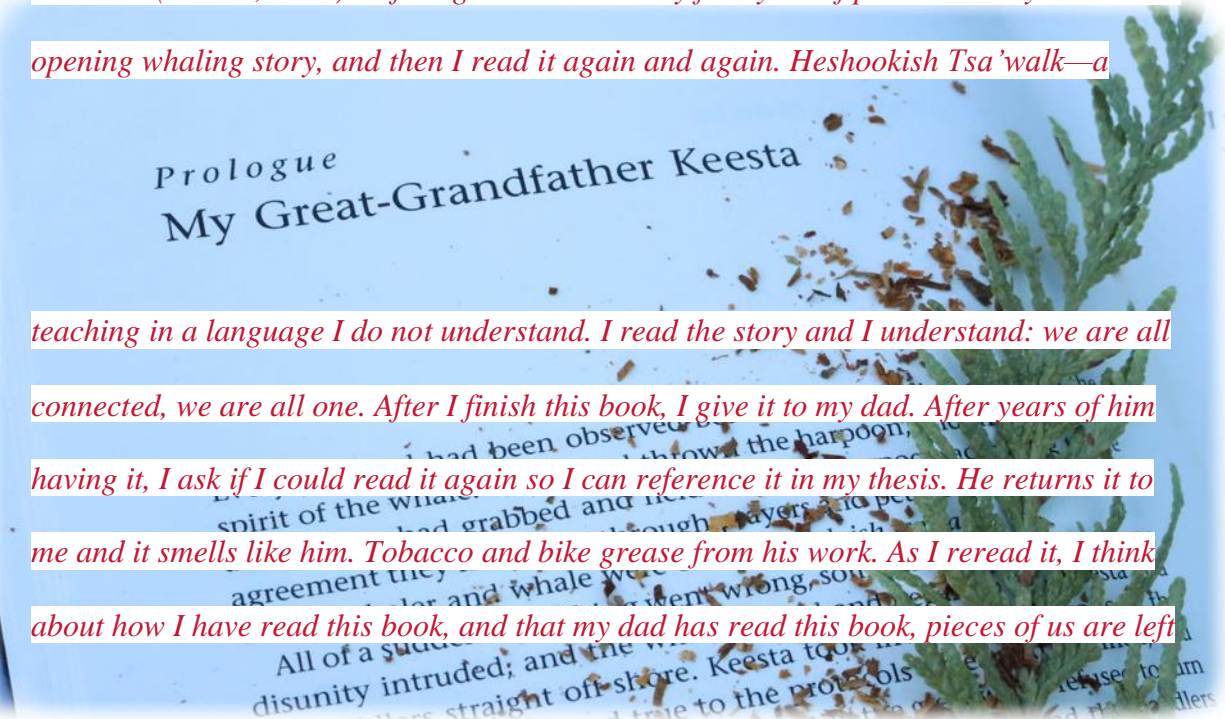
However, adopting an unsettling ethic in frontline practice is not as simple as reclaiming the past. Part of decolonizing my practice involves taking on the responsibility of centering my Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, doing, and being. To be decolonial, I must hold my Indigenous teachings and my Nuu-chah-nulth values in the same regard that I hold the knowledge from my postsecondary education. Being able to do this has required me to embark on a journey of accepting that "it is [my] birth right to practice these [knowledges and skills]" (Sandrina Carere, personal communication, August 21st, 2023).

Weaving my strands of colonial disconnection, academic experiences, and praxis ethics together highlights the importance of embodying decolonial reclamation. The integral need for a reclamation strand has become apparent through my lived and embodied exploration of how colonial disconnection has impacted my identity formation. In my fourth strand, I share parts of my reclamation journey and returning home to Ahousaht for the first time.

Strand 4: Reclamation Journey

Heshookish Tsa'walk

It is clear that reclaiming Indigenous identity is a difficult and complex process filled with challenges, shame, and grief, and can be a long journey to replace internalized racism and colonial pain with spiritual teachings (Wright Cardinal, 2017). Reclaiming is difficult, draining, and unacknowledged labour that white-privileged people do not have to shoulder (de Finney, Sam, et al., 2019). However, reclaiming can also be a process of immense healing, restoration, reclamation, and gifts, requiring us to use an array of strategies and engagements (de Finney, 2015). A central theme or teaching that has helped me in my journey of reclamation is the Nuu-chah-nulth concept of *Heshookish Tsa'walk*.

Heshookish Tsa'walk is a fundamental concept in the Nuu-chah-nulth worldview, meaning everything is one or everything is connected (Umeek, 2004). Heshookish Tsa'walk (Umeek, 2004)—I first got the book in my first year of postsecondary. I read the opening whaling story, and then I read it again and again. Heshookish Tsa'walk—a teaching in a language I do not understand. I read the story and I understand: we are all connected, we are all one. After I finish this book, I give it to my dad. After years of him having it, I ask if I could read it again so I can reference it in my thesis. He returns it to me and it smells like him. Tobacco and bike grease from his work. As I reread it, I think about how I have read this book, and that my dad has read this book, pieces of us are left

in the book. I think about my kids having this book, and it smelling of tobacco. I think

about my grandchildren reading this book, and it smelling of tobacco and a great-

grandfather that they may or may not have met. Heshookish Tsa'walk—we are all

connected, we are all one.

    Heshookish Tsa'walk was the first teaching I learned about Nuu-chah-nulth

culture, and I have held it close to my heart ever since. My worldview is grounded in

Heshookish Tsa'walk, and naturally so is my heart work. In order to represent my

worldview of *Heshookish Tsa'walk*, my woven methodology represents my

understanding of the principle foundation of Nuu-chah-nulth worldview: "everything is

one" (Atleo, 2009).

    Living as Nuu-chah-nulth embraces action and renewal. This is reflected in our

language, which is verb oriented and process oriented (Atleo, 2008; Little Bear, 2000).

This orientation indicates the importance of *doing* over *being*. Atleo (2009) poses the idea

that living as Nuu-chah-nulth is more significant and vital than simply being Nuu-chah-

nulth, and that "centering [our] identity on action and *living* creates opportunity for a

richer expression of identity that is rooted in a common worldview and principals that can

help [us] transcend many of the ills of colonialism" (p. 40, emphasis in original). Inspired

by many brilliant Indigenous scholars, authors, practitioners, and community members, I

have been drawn towards "presencing" (Simpson, 2011) myself within my own process

of decolonizing my CYC praxis. For me, presencing represents an Indigenous approach

to embodiment, because it brings together the personal, spiritual, ancestral and political

aspects of embodying a decolonial ethic. Engaging in presencing requires me to fully

implicate myself in the process of decolonizing my praxis, because "colonialism does not

only occupy our lands, it also occupies our minds, bodies, and narratives, and re-occupying these spaces is a form of resurgence" (Lee, 2011, para. 4). By presencing myself, I am living as Nuu-chah-nulth, embracing doing over being, and centering my heart work around the action I am taking to develop and embody my woven approach to a decolonial praxis.

Decolonization and Resurgence of Indigenous Identity

On March 5, 2024, my auntie came over for tea after work. She brought me a drum that my late grandfather had made. He had given it to his mother (my great grandma), and when my auntie was in university, she would visit her and have tea. She admired the drum and the beautiful sound it made. It is filled with beads, and when you shift the drum around, it sounds like the ocean waves. It is a beautiful sound. Her grandma (my great grandma) gave her the drum. Years later, as her and I sat and had tea together and talked about school, and life, and family, she gifted the drum to me.

I shared with her a bit about my thesis and what I am writing about. She told me that she understands and respects where I am coming from, in terms of my positionality and self-location, but she can just hear her auntie, my Nana, saying, "Oh, you are Quu'as'a, you are family, you are Quu'as'a." She reminded me of our values, and what it means to be in community. She

reminded me about parts of myself that sometimes feel lost amid all of the colonialism

surrounding me.

While decolonization and Indigenous resurgence appear similar, they are two

separate yet connected concepts. Decolonization involves Indigenous and settler people

dismantling the colonial system, and the reinstatement of Indigenous self-determination.

Resurgence involves Indigenous people remembering holistic cultural frameworks and

reclaiming their respective Nations' teachings and practices (Wright Cardinal, 2017).

Reclaiming Indigenous identity can be an act of both decolonization and resurgence,

especially when questioning colonial constructs of identity and learning teachings from

our lands and from the knowledge holders. Wright Cardinal (2017) shares that

"reclaiming Indigenous identity is an act of decolonization that can be languaged as a

shift from hegemonic discourses to spirit based discourses that center Indigenous healing

and wholeness" (pp. 82–83). Identity formation is an important part of an individual's

development, and it requires an ongoing inward spiritual journey supported by

community (Ermine, Sinclair, & Jeffery, 2014; Hart, 2010). As well, literature suggests

the importance of collective learning that happens in community, and how this is

foundational to healthy Indigenous identity (Wright Cardinal, 2017).

While cultural and identity knowledge can be learned vicariously through books

and other nonfamilial means, such as academic institutions, we must remember the

importance of experiencing these knowledges as they actually exist, in an embodied way

(Wright Cardinal, 2017). Our ways of being are alive and must be lived to be learned. My

understanding of this is that decolonization is not an individual-focused notion; rather, it

is a communal, relational process intimately tied to land, territory, community, and political self-determination (de Finney, 2015; Lee, 2011; Simpson, 2011, 2014).

As an urban Indigenous woman with white privilege who has been culturally disconnected through colonization, I understand the vital importance of urban, removed Indigenous people having access to community and culture in urban spaces. Returning home, returning to community, is not always accessible for many reasons, such as financial strain, disconnected relationships with family and community members, internalized shame and guilt, and stolen knowledge around what community and nation one belongs to. After overcoming many of my own barriers and fears, I recently had the opportunity to visit Ahousaht, and return home for my first time.

Returning Home

The morning we were going to Ahousaht, my husband and best friend kept checking in with me. They knew I had never been back home, and were anticipating it to be an emotional experience for me. I did not know what to expect. I kept thinking about all of the things I was expected to feel, having read about others' reclamation journeys and experiences for my thesis. I was trying to keep myself calm, but I did not feel anxious. We arrived at the

dock early in the morning. We climbed onto the boat. The air was misty, and there was fog over the water. There was wind, and the water was choppy. The boat was rocking, and waves were splashing up over the boat. My husband was nervous, and so were others on the boat. I was unsettled, but not about the swells of water crashing around us. I was unsettled by how calm I felt. Normally an anxious person, my steady breathing and heart rate felt unfamiliar to me. Looking out the window, I was taking in the views; rocky shoreline; strong, bushy cedars
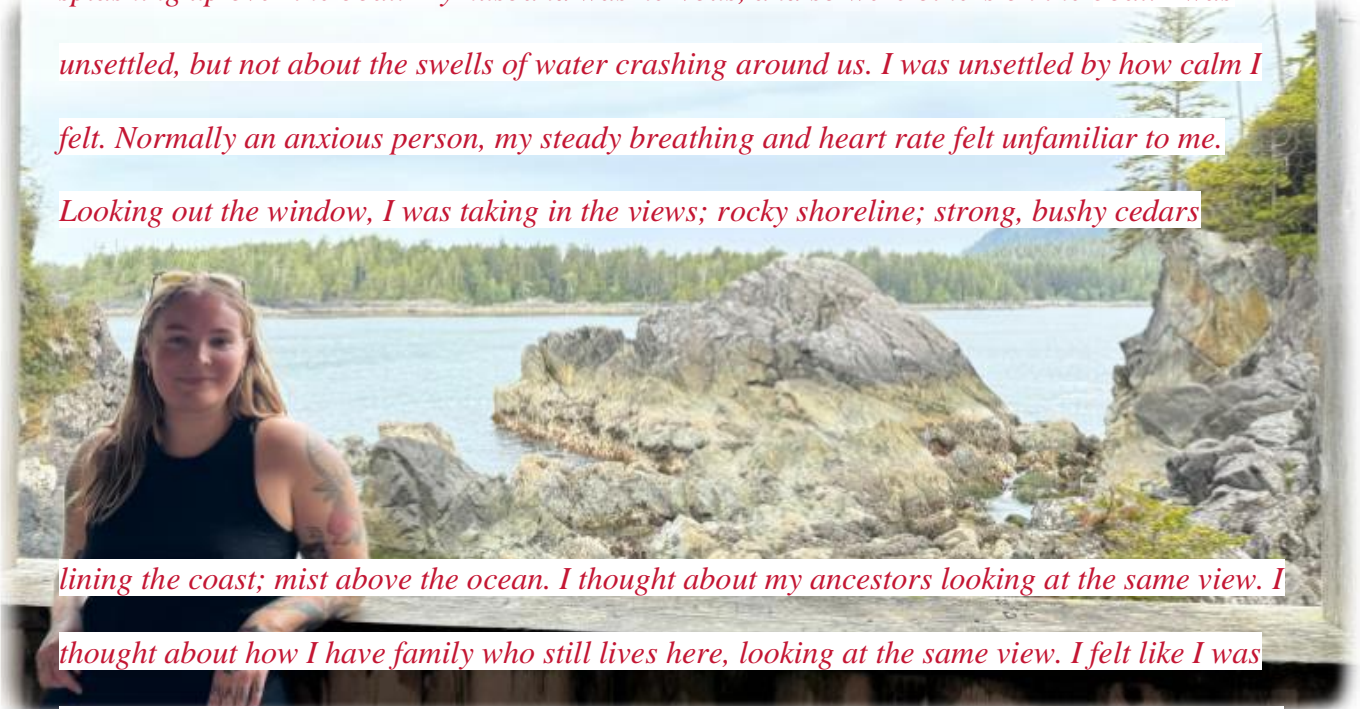
lining the coast; mist above the ocean. I thought about my ancestors looking at the same view. I thought about how I have family who still lives here, looking at the same view. I felt like I was looking into a dream I have had many times. This place I had never seen before felt so familiar. The boat ride was an hour and a half long, yet I didn't feel as though we had been out there for more than a few moments. We docked. I climbed off the boat with ease, with no sea legs. I was not in an unfamiliar place. This place felt at home.
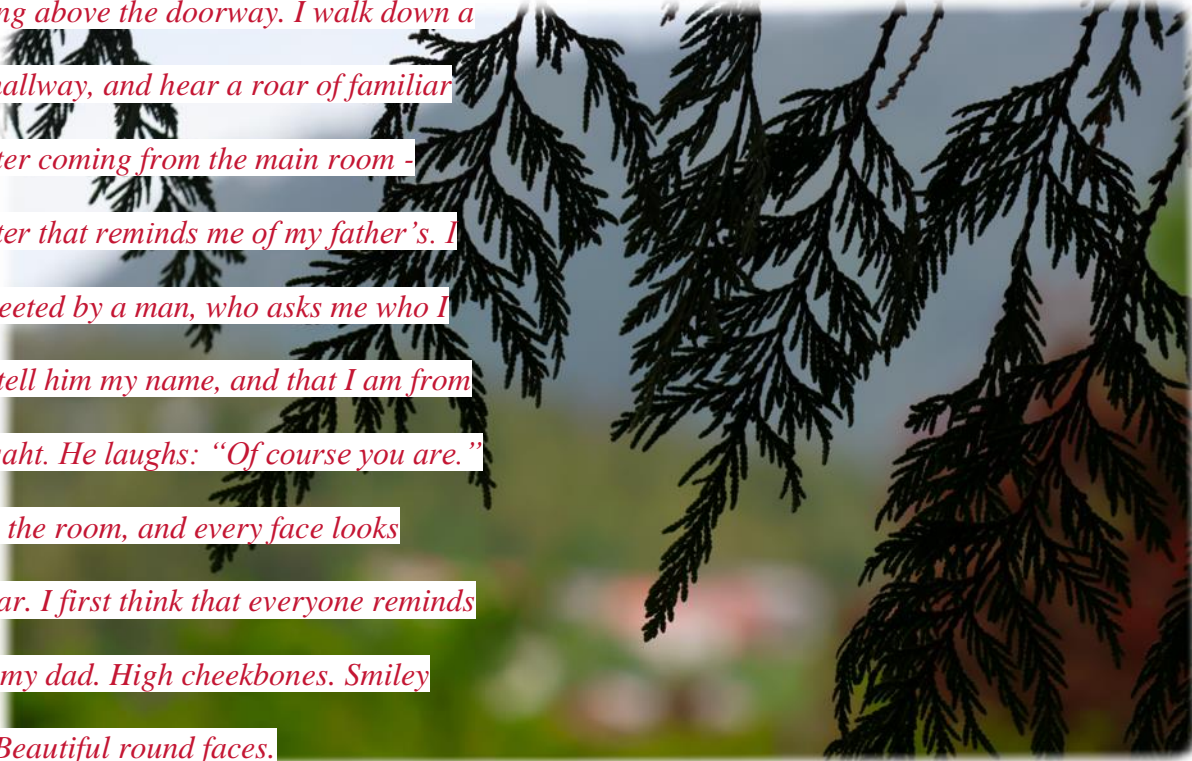
Critical to Atleo's (2009) understanding of living as Nuu-chah-nulth is an inseparable connection to our homelands. In my commitment to develop and embody my woven approach to decolonial praxis, I made multiple trips to Nuu-chah-nulth territory during my thesis-writing journey, and during one of those times returned to Ahousaht for my first time. Deep-rooted pain I experience due to disconnection from my Indigenous identity and lands felt relieved when I was on Nuu-chah-nulth territory, spending time on the land, being around community members, and reframing what it means to be Indigenous (Atleo, 2008; Ormiston, 2012; Wright Cardinal, 2017).

As Ormiston stressed, "it is essential that Indigenous people continue to decolonize themselves by reclaiming histories, values, languages and traditions. The path towards self-determination means Indigenous people will provide their own solutions to their own problems and bring to life elements of their lives that have sustained them since time immemorial" (2012, p. 9). The storywork shared of my academic experiences and the development of my praxis ethics and dilemmas in practice has brought me to a place where I understand the importance of reclaiming my Indigenous identity and culture and returning home. My final strand, finishing my weaving, outlines the beneficial impact that reclaiming my identity and culture and returning home have had on my own wellbeing, and in return on my decolonial CYC praxis.

Strand 5: Indigenous Decolonization in Practice

I attend a family gathering, and I travel there alone. I get to the big house and feel timid. A naturally shy person by nature, I am hesitant to walk into a crowded room alone -a room filled with people I am related to, yet am unfamiliar with. I find my courage and I walk through the main doors. I am greeted by a brushing from cedar,

hanging above the doorway. I walk down a long hallway, and hear a roar of familiar laughter coming from the main room - laughter that reminds me of my father's. I am greeted by a man, who asks me who I am. I tell him my name, and that I am from Ahousaht. He laughs: "Of course you are." I scan the room, and every face looks familiar. I first think that everyone reminds me of my dad. High cheekbones. Smiley eyes. Beautiful round faces.

I find my auntie. When we were sitting at the event, she started quietly explaining the events, connections, and interpreting Nuu-chah-nulth words that she knew to me. She noted that this is what her grandma (my great grandma) did when they attended events together- haahuupa – continuous teaching with care. She introduces me to Aunties. And Uncles. Cousins. People who were friends with my grandpa. She tells them I am in school, finishing my masters. Everyone is happy to meet me. Some shake my hand, some hug me. My auntie tells me, this is what it means to be Nuu-chah-nulth. Being here, with family. Before I leave, I go into the washroom. As I am

washing my hands,
I look up in the
mirror. I understand
why everyone
looked familiar.
High cheekbones.
Smiley eyes.
Beautiful
round face.

Relevant literature highlights how connection to culture creates opportunities for community support, relationship building, healing, and a sense of belonging (Carrière, 2010; Hart, 2002; Kirmayer et al., 2009; Sinclair, 2009; Thomas & Green, 2015). Having connection to cultural and spiritual teachings and practices, and knowledge around colonization and its impacts on individuals, families, communities, and Nations, is important for healing and moving forward (Wright Cardinal, 2017). Embracing Indigeneity has been described as "knowledge at a cellular level" (Black, 2011, p. 54), resulting in healing and wellbeing (Wright Cardinal, 2017). Spirituality is also an important component of healing journeys, which Cyndy Baskin (2016) describes as "wholeness, making meaning, and creating inner peace" (p. 171). Reconnection to our spiritual inheritance is central to reclaiming Indigenous worldviews and sense of self.

Baskin (2016) states that having cultural competency in our work is not enough; our practice must be rooted in an Indigenous worldview in order to achieve cultural safety. Brown (2008) poses the important question: "are we more likely to practice in a culturally-centered way if we ourselves are culturally-centered?" (p. 17). Centering my Indigenous self in praxis is crucial to my understanding of how culturally grounded work is influenced by my own worldview and connection to culture in my own life (Brown, 2008). It is vital that Indigenous practitioners are supported in their cultural healing and identity development journeys (Brown, 2008; Linklater, 2014).

Given my positionality as a young, urban Indigenous CYC practitioner with white privilege, it is foundational for me to reclaim and reconstruct my identity in order to maintain wellness, and to be able to walk alongside others in our shared healing journey (Anderson, 2000; Brown, 2008). Brown (2008) clearly states that supporting the wellness of Indigenous practitioners is imperative for creating better outcomes for the children, youth, families, and communities that we support. This sentiment has been a guiding factor in my own reclamation journey, as I hold a responsibility to show up for my family and community and in my livelihood in a good way that is grounded in my own wellbeing and sense of self and belonging. Indigenous social work scholar Cyndy Baskin (2016) asserts that it is absolutely necessary to create wellness for Indigenous practitioners; she describes practices such as avoiding isolation, engaging in action when feeling disempowered or angry towards systems, and practicing acts of self-reflection. It is imperative as an urban Indigenous CYC practitioner with white privilege that I know what keeps me well, and this knowledge provides me with the ability to move forward in my livelihood in a way that feels good and sustainable (Brown, 2008).

Atleo (2009) reminds us that, "[w]hile it is appropriate to heed the wisdom of our ancestors, this does not forego our own responsibilities to think critically and act carefully, interpreting as best we can to keep our foundational principals alive and our communities healthy" (p. 58). He describes the relationship between principle and practice as critical. Principles are envisioned to be unchanging, regardless of changing circumstances, whereas practices are assumed to change over time, so long as they uphold our principles. Given the positionality and spatiality in which I exist, "(re)mapping," as Mishuana Goeman (2013) describes, "is not just about regaining that which was lost and returning to an original and pure point in history, but instead understanding the processes that have defined [my] current spatialities in order to sustain vibrant and Native futures" (p. 3). In terms of fostering decolonial Indigenous futures, I understand that our stories are fragile and need tending, our existence is delicate, and we have responsibilities that we must not neglect (Coon, 2014; Goeman, 2013).

My process of reclaiming and centering my Indigenous self within my praxis has encouraged me to thinking critically about how I can best uphold and embody Nuu-chah-nulth values and ways of knowing, doing, and being. In order to reclaim my Indigenous identity and culture, I have had to move through the intergenerational pain and grief that is woven throughout my identity. Engaging in a practice of Indigenous feminism has been a way for me to move through the intergenerational pain and grief that is woven throughout my identity. To borrow words from Emily Coon (2014), reclaiming Indigenous spatialities means that, "I am working through the violence my grandmothers, aunties, and cousins have endured, exploring the places where trauma tore our family

apart, and am holding up the resiliency, strength and resurgence that they embodied" (p. 22).

My journey of understanding ways in which colonial violence has impacted my life, my family, my community, and my Nation, is never ending. However, Coon reminds me that "[we] are not just passive subjects of colonialism—our lives are overflowing with strength and determination, weaving together our kinship relations with care and compassion" (p. 21). I did not choose to have violence, pain, and grief tear through my identity, causing disconnection. Within my reclamation journey, heart work and thesis writing, I have come to realize it is my responsibility and my birthright to weave together these components of myself, no matter how painful, to create a (re)connected identity for myself and develop and embody a decolonial praxis.

After months of weaving together these strands of colonial disconnection, educational and academic experiences, praxis ethics, my reclamation journey, and my Indigenous wellbeing, I have finished the weaving of my headband. In my final chapter, I discuss wearing my headband as part of embodying my decolonial praxis. As well, I share implications for educational and practice settings and highlight the suggestions and recommendations shared in the literature I explored in my thesis.
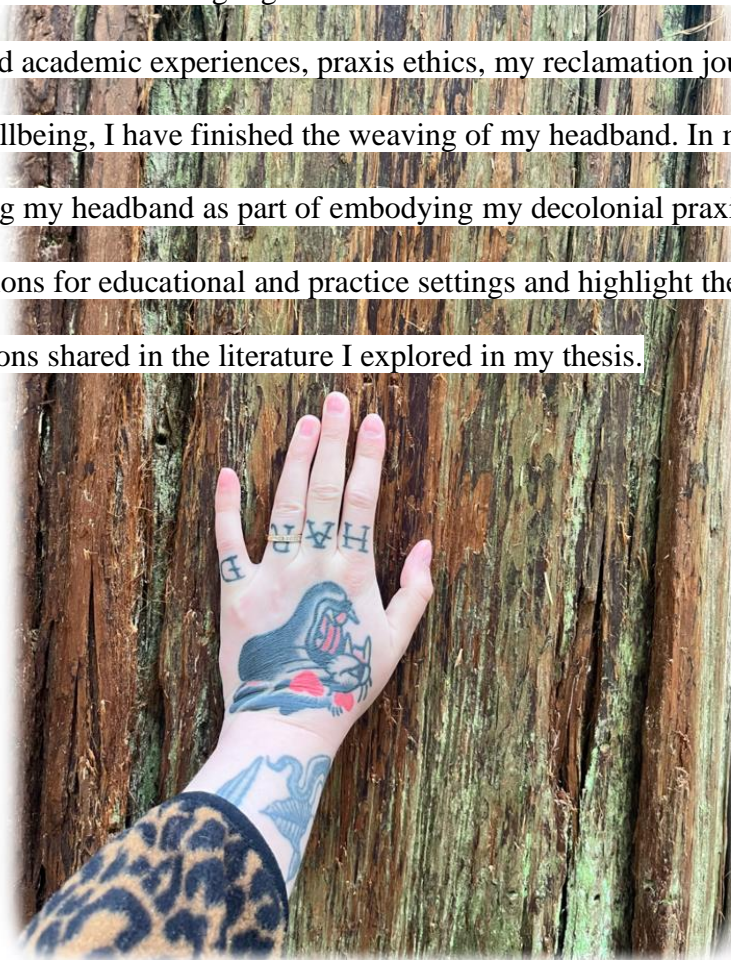
Chapter 4: Wearing my Headband

For my final piece of storywork, I wanted a photo of myself wearing my cedar headband with the busy cityscape of downtown Victoria, occupying unceded Ləkʷəŋən homelands, in the background, capturing my experience of living as Nuu-chah-nulth in an urban landscape. I felt nervous at the prospect of taking this photo. What would people think when they saw me? Would they judge me? Would they harass me? Would they make comments? Would I look like I was trying too hard? Was I posing? Was I "playing Indian"? Have I earned the right to wear my headband?

I decided to take my photo at dusk, claiming the lighting would be better, and the streetlights would add a nice effect. Truthfully, I was hoping it would be quiet and no one would see me. My husband and friend encouraged me, as they took my photo and captured the image that I hoped for. This was the final component I needed for my thesis.

I thought about my thesis journey. I thought about my reclamation journey. I thought about what these journeys meant for the development and embodiment of my decolonial praxis. I spent so many hours reading articles and searching for myself within the literature, only ever seeing strands that represented parts of my experience. I reflected on how I thoughtfully harvested these strands of my experiences from the literature, and sat with them for months. At first, I imagined myself taking these strands into the ocean with me, cleansing them and letting them soften alongside me. We spent months doing this. I felt like I should be writing, weaving my thesis together. I knew it wasn't time yet. I wasn't ready yet and neither were my strands.

After months of preparing, I felt ready to begin weaving. I sat down at a café, and wrote out pages of stories and memories for my storywork. I added these new strands

with the strands I gathered from the literature. I took these strands to my supervisor and

she helped me organize them into thematic strands. I realized it was time to weave. I

didn't know how to weave. I saw that UVic was hosting a cedar Nuu-chah-nulth

headband-weaving workshop. I felt nervous to go. But I needed to learn to weave. I was

ready.

I took what I learned at this workshop - strength, resilience, determination,

patience, self-compassion and love - and applied it to my methodological weaving for my

thesis. I wove my thematic strands together with my stories and experiences. It felt

clumsy, and I had to go back and redo some of it. I felt discouraged at times. I was

reassured I was doing good work. I had harvested my strands in a good way, with

intention and thoughtfulness. My strands are strong. My weaving is strong. My headband

is strong. I am strong. I reflected on this as I was standing on the street corner downtown

with my headband. The work I had put into my headband, the work I had put into my

thesis and the development and enactment of my decolonial praxis. I was proud to wear

my headband.

Implications for my Decolonial Praxis

In my final chapter, *Wearing my Headband*, I reflect on the key learnings from

my thematic strands, my storywork, and what it took for me to learn, reclaim, and centre

my Nuu-chah-nulth identity in my decolonial praxis. As I try to categorize the learnings

into practice and personal implications, I am reminded that these components of myself

are woven together, as my livelihood is not separate from the rest of my existence.

Wearing my headband is embodying my decolonial praxis, representing my body being

decolonized by occupying space in the city and claiming visibility unapologetically and

without shame.

A key theme of my thesis explored my decolonial praxis as an urban Indigenous

CYC frontline practitioner with white privilege. My storywork shares my experiences

and the impacts colonial disconnection and displacement have had on my Nuu-chah-nulth

identity, and the pain, shame, and heavy load I carry as a result. Kim Anderson (2000)

discusses how women are traditional helpers who contribute to health and wellness in

communities, and speaks to the impacts that displacement has had on urban Indigenous

women. By understanding my experiences as an urban Indigenous woman with white

privilege, I am able to tend to the colonial wound I have carried since I was young, and

work towards healing and resisting this pain. I can also actively work to unsettle the

settler colonial systems that continue to intentionally cause this colonial disconnection for

myself, my family, my urban community, my clients, and the other urban Indigenous CYC practitioners with white privilege with whom I have the honour of working. Being honest and vulnerable with my experiences as an urban Indigenous CYC practitioner with white privilege, and synthesising literature and the experiences of others that are similar to mine, has allowed for me to feel more confident in my specific responsibilities of centering decolonial ethics.

A key learning I take away from this research is that when working with Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities, we must be doing front line practice in a good way, grounded in cultural values and worldviews (Brown, 2008). Linklater (2014) describes how connection to spirit and to cultural and ceremonial resources allows practitioners to walk in a grounded way by creating a sense of community and belonging, which is particularly important for those in urban communities. My process of decolonizing my CYC praxis involves a journey of identity and cultural reclamation, which includes stepping into, and centering, these other ways of knowing, doing, and being and going about this in a respectful and intentional way. Growing up urban and colonially disconnected from my Nuu-chah-nulth identity, culture, and lands requires me to intentionally and respectfully tend to my reclamation journey in order to ground my praxis in cultural values and worldviews. My reclamation work not only benefits my praxis; my entire wellbeing as an urban Indigenous woman with white privilege benefits from my reclamation journey, as a sense of belonging is integral to my wellness (Carrière & Richardson, 2009; Carrière & Sinclair, 2009).

Indigenous methodologies center the importance of where we have come from and where we are now, and they acknowledge and hold accountable how these

experiences influence our praxis (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009). They include

decolonizing Western modalities and centering culturally appropriate approaches and

holistic practices (Baskin, 2016; Hart, 2009; Linklater, 2014; Thomas & Green, 2015)

rooted in old traditions. Traditionally, Indigenous knowledge seeking has had the purpose

of educating and passing on knowledge, and has been solution-focused for the intention

of survival (Absolon & Willett, 2004). It is important for me to have done research that I

feel has a purpose and that will be used practically and for the benefit and wellbeing of

myself and of my community (Sinclair et al., 2009), by providing a woven approach to

developing and embodying a decolonial praxis that other practitioners can draw from.

I want to honour the experiences and information that I share and let my work

guide future practice and ways of being in the CYC field. I demonstrate my commitment

to centering traditional values of oneness, respect, reciprocity, and responsibility in my

praxis by embodying the Nuu-chah-nulth teaching *Heshookish Tsa'walk*. By engaging in

and sharing parts of my reclamation journey through storywork and photographic

collages throughout my thesis, I am living as Nuu-chah-nulth by embracing *doing* over

being. Adding my own voice to this growing body of literature in the CYC field allows

me to continue the circle of Indigenous truth and future-making by following the pattern

of receiving and giving (Brant, 1994). As such, I will be carrying the lessons I have

learned about my decolonial praxis into my future front line work with a great deal of

care and compassion for my evolving social and cultural location.

Implications for Educational Settings

Another theme I addressed in my thesis was the importance of creating culturally

responsive, decolonial educational environments for Indigenous students of all

backgrounds, as Battiste states that, "the decolonization of education is not just about changing a system for Indigenous peoples, but for everyone. We will all benefit by it" (2013, p. 22).

In synthesizing relevant literature and studies on Indigenous education experiences and Indigenizing academia and weaving these findings and recommendations together with my own experiences, I highlighted the importance of centering the experiences of Indigenous students and faculty in decolonial and Indigenizing efforts and policies in academic institutions. Many scholars have discussed the importance of culturally responsive and culturally based educational programming for Indigenous students (e.g., Anuik et al., 2010; Cajete, 1994; Castagno & McKinley, 2008; Deloria, 1990; Grande, 2004). A major theme of Wright Cardinal's (2017) doctoral research on reconnecting with Indigenous identity is the importance of educational programming in the reclamation of Indigenous identity and culture. Wright Cardinal claims that the powerful possibilities for formal education programs to assist with decolonization cannot be understated (Wright Cardinal, 2017). The need to decolonize self is intrinsically tied together with the goal and process of decolonizing academic institutions, a process which is never complete. Rather, it requires work that is critical, reflective, and never ending.

Other studies in education have reiterated these points. Following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (2015), Indspire (2018) sent a survey to over 2000 Indigenous postsecondary students on their insights and perspectives as to how the Calls to Action had affected their education experiences. Most noted by the students were (1) gratitude for access to Indigenous supports and services, (2) a need for further funding, (3) the need to make culture, identity, and belonging part of the healing

journey for Indigenous learners, (4) the imperative for quality Indigenous course content, and (5) the need for Indigenous role models in spaces of higher learning. In response to the TRC's calls, Efimoff (2022) proposed the following recommendations: (1) ensure that authentic Indigenous student representation is foundational in the Indigenization process; (2) acknowledge the impact of over engagement with Indigenization on Indigenous students and work with them to mitigate it; (3) co-create a community that can Indigenize; and (4) make Indigenous knowledges and values fundamental in Indigenization processes.

Barnes and Voyageur (2020) emphasize that postsecondary programs and courses that explore topics such as Indigenous rights and history, white privilege, critical race theory, and decolonization can be vital in the journey of self-definition and self-acceptance for Indigenous students, by providing significant support, understanding, exposure, and encouragement in understanding their Indigenous identity. Cori Bazemore-James and Beth Boyd (2021) suggest that postsecondary faculty can support and encourage mixed-race Indigenous students in developing a strong multiracial identity by creating spaces in courses and on campus to discuss and critically analyze multiple racial identities and learn about their cultural backgrounds. Terry Mitchell and colleagues (2018) propose that academic institutions can create safe(r) spaces through the inclusion of more Indigenous faculty and greater focus on Indigenous sciences and the opportunities that can come with Indigenous methodologies for investigating phenomena not on but for and with Indigenous peoples. This requires academic institutions and individuals to commit to a personal and ongoing process of self-reflection and

decolonization and a lifetime commitment to decolonizing the self, curriculum, research topics, academic processes, and educational spaces.

Decolonization and being anticolonial are not simple, as colonialism has seeped into the deepest aspects of life, including the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations that inform our beliefs, behaviours, understandings, and interpretations of the world (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Barker, 2012; Cote-Meek, 2014; Smith, 1999). Decolonization requires an immense commitment to transformation for many educational institutions that have been operating under colonial systems for so long (Mitchell et al., 2018). Indigenization is a profound project, requiring a community. Both the literature and personal accounts shared by Indigenous students and faculty on the impacts of over-engaging in Indigenization efforts highlight the disproportionate impact this work has on their well being. Efimoff's (2022) proposal of co-creating a community that can Indigenize stems from the participants' described experience that many initiatives designed to include and support Indigenous students also have the potential to cause harm through overwork, over-engagement, and inevitable exhaustion and burnout. Given the emotional and spiritual impact that sharing our experiences and journeys has on our wellbeing, appropriate supports need to be in place to uphold and honour our work towards Indigenization efforts. This emotional and spiritual labour needs to be taken into account when determining the level of responsibilities delegated to Indigenous students and faculty, the number of people needed to do this work in a good way, as well as what is appropriate compensation for us to contribute to institutional change without experiencing significant financial, social, or academic sacrifices.

Summary

Creating and wearing my woven Nuu-chah-nulth headband represents the process of embodied decolonial praxis and all that it entails. By exploring thematic strands related to the impact of colonial history on Indigenous identity and how this disconnected me from my Nuu-chah-nulth identity, my personal process of reclaiming my identity and culture, my experiences in educational and academic settings, and my decolonial ethics in praxis, I have created a woven approach to my decolonial praxis that takes into account the implications of holding white privilege and the responsibility to respectfully and intentionally reclaim my culture and Nuu-chah-nulth identity. Having found myself caught in between these identities and the available literature on this topic, I saw the importance of sharing my journey with the intention to contribute new Indigenous knowledge for the growing population of urban Indigenous young people with white privilege. Doing so allowed me to better understand how my experiences influence my reclamation journey as an urban Indigenous CYC practitioner with white privilege, as I was able to see myself in others' journeys that were similar to my own.

In her storytelling writing, McIvor (2010) describes the importance of "stepping outside" of her academic trajectory and truly devoting herself to revitalization. I must be careful not to get caught up in a romantic notion of Indigeneity and only develop a surface or tokenistic level of appreciation and reclamation. I am committed to "living the life and internalizing the things that [I am] learning about . . . as it is the act of living the beliefs that makes them real" (Wilson, 2001, p. 178). I demonstrate my commitment to embodying the woven components of my decolonial praxis through the reclamation work

I have done throughout my heart work journey, which I share through my storywork and photographic collages. In doing so, I am doing my part living as Nuu-chah-nulth.

In terms of dissemination, my thesis will be shared through the University of Victoria thesis and dissertation portal, as well as through the extensive Kinship Rising research network and knowledge dissemination platforms, which include newsletters, a website, presentations and publications. Artwork, stories, resources, and multimedia products are shown on the Kinship Rising website as part of an ethic of continuous reporting back to ensure accessibility and visibility (de Finney, Sam, et al., 2019). Kinship Rising ethics extend to knowledge mobilization practices across diverse rural and urban communities, frontline service providers, researchers, and policy makers (Carere & Yamauchi, 2024). I am committed to making my research widely accessible through public, open-access websites such as Kinship Rising and the UVic thesis portal, and by using storytelling to center my own voice, perspectives, and experiences, as this is integral to Indigenous research paradigms (Absolon, 2011; Absolon & Willett, 2005; Brown, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). By putting my storywork out publically, I am providing readers the opportunity to be active witnesses to my experience as an urban Indigenous practitioner with white privilege who embarked on a journey to develop and embody a decolonial praxis. My storywork is vulnerable and sacred, and as an act of resistance against the historical and on-going harms colonial research has had on Indigenous people and communities, I am committed to unapologetically carving out space for my own restoration of dignity, healing and strength.

I believe that the research and storywork I share raise important issues related to the political, practice, and personal dimensions of being an urban Indigenous practitioner

with white privilege. As outlined by Absolon, "there is urgency and a very strong pull to reclaim our birthright as Indigenous peoples before they are lost (…) For some, the academy is the means in which we are finding our way back home. Through the academy, we are searching for our knowledge, histories, cultures, traditions, stories, names, identity, community, and family. We require congruent methodologies so that we do not get lost. Indigenous knowledge and methodologies enable us to conduct our searches so that we find ourselves" (2011, p. 110). I want to ensure that I am respectfully discussing and critically analyzing knowledge that already exists and moving forward in a way that will benefit my own life, my decolonial praxis, and other current and future urban Indigenous CYC practitioners with white privilege. By using Indigenous methodologies and paradigms such as storytelling, I am hoping to create and contribute to innovative Indigenous ontologies and uncover new ways of knowing (Sinclair et al., 2009; Thomas, 2005; Wilson, 2007) that speak to practice in our increasingly complex socio-political context.

Regarding the importance of equalizing relationships, it is integral that I work from a place of honouring and accepting that each person has had a different experience, and they are all equally valid and important. This way of conducting an inquiry falls in line with the common Indigenous worldview that there is no one absolute, that each living being will interact with their environments in different ways, and they are all still true (Hart, 2010). My intent in including this worldview is to bring relational Indigenous knowledge into the heart of my storywork methodology because Western research, knowledges, and practices have invalidated and taken precedence over Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being.

An unintended, but arguably the most significant, outcome of this thesis has been the profound healing impacts this heart work has had on my identity and wellbeing as an urban Indigenous woman with white privilege. Taking the time to intentionally connect to parts of my identity, my community, culture, and land has healed wounds that have always ached but were so deep that Western healing methods were not able to heal them; they were neglected and went untreated. Engaging in this heart work journey of reclaiming my Nuu-chah-nulth identity has allowed me to be tender with these colonial wounds. The development and embodiment of a truly decolonial praxis is hard, heavy work; it has required the balancing of my responsibilities as an urban Indigenous person with white privilege, a student, a front line worker, and a family member, all while remaining hopeful and optimistic about the future. Supporting my self-determination, reclamation, and wellbeing allows me to sustain my hopeful and optimistic commitments of my decolonial praxis. I raise my hands to all of those who have, who are, and who will embark on similar journeys.

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