

Beginning Within: Exploring a White Settler Emerging Practice for Justice-Doing

by

Julie Laliberte  
BCYC, University of Victoria, 2015

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

There is an increase of White settler Child and Youth Care (CYC) practitioners who are questioning how to be useful in their attempts at solidarity and justice-doing amidst precarious ethics and tensions. Meanwhile, Indigenous women, girls, trans and two-spirit people are being murdered and taken (MMIWGT2S+) at genocidal rates with little action from Canadian government and RCMP. Drawing from critical race theory, intersectional feminism, and anti-oppressive praxis, this research traces my own path to justice-doing and solidarity exploring the concept of witnessing as a White settler. With a critical examination of self, Whiteness, and White supremacy, I attempt to answer the research questions: *In what ways can witnessing function as a useful practice framework for White settler solidarity? Secondly, how can art act as witness or co-conspirator?* Using an arts-based critical autoethnography, this study combines personal narratives with arts-based reflections on researcher's experience as White settler facilitator of the program Youth for Dignity on unceded Kaska territory in Watson Lake, Yukon. The research focuses on the creation of a collaborative art piece on MMIWGT2S+ to explore witnessing as one pathway for White settlers committed to social change. Building on the work of Vikki Reynolds (2010a, 2010b, 2012) and other literature on solidarity and witnessing, seven witnessing intentions that inform my White Settler Emerging Solidarity Practice surfaced from this research: (a) critical examination of self; (b) reciprocal and respectful relationships; (c) intersectionality; (d) embodied listening; (e) honouring resistance; (f) action; and (g) accountability. This research has the potential to provide a possible pathway for other CYC practitioners to engage with the complexities and tensions of White settler solidarity practice.

## Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures.....	vii
Acknowledgments.....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Who I Am.....	1
My Background.....	2
Connection to LAWS.....	4
Positionality.....	5
Description of Problem/Issue.....	7
Context.....	8
YFD and MMIWGT2S+.....	10
Purpose & Research Questions.....	12
Rationale.....	14
Unsettling key terms.....	15
White Supremacy.....	15
Indicators of White Supremacy.....	17
White Privilege.....	17
Resistance.....	19
Chapter Summary.....	21
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	22
Theoretical lenses of my Praxis Framework.....	22
Critical Race Theory (CRT).....	23
Intersectional feminism.....	25
Anti-Oppressive Praxis.....	26
White Settler Solidarity.....	27
Solidarity vs. Allyship.....	28
Critiques and Common Pitfalls of Settler Justice-Doing.....	28
Identity vs. Action.....	29
Settler Moves to Innocence.....	29
White Saviour Complex.....	31
White Guilt.....	31
White Fragility.....	32
Qualities of Solidarity/Allyship.....	32
Action.....	33
Critical Self-awareness and Structural Analysis.....	34

Relationality.....	34
Amplification of voices.....	36
Accountability.....	37
Discomfort.....	38
Witnessing.....	39
Witnessing as Framework for Practice.....	40
Witnessing in/as Research.....	43
Collaborative Witnessing Approach.....	43
Faithful Witnessing.....	44
Chapter Summary.....	45
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	46
Critical Autoethnography.....	47
History.....	48
Common CAE Methods.....	50
Arts-based Research.....	50
Data Collection Methods.....	52
Personal Narratives.....	52
Art based reflections.....	54
Vignettes from YFD participants.....	54
Why this Methodology and approach fits with my research.....	57
Limitations and Critiques.....	58
Critiques on Methodology and Approaches.....	58
Validity and Generalizability.....	59
Chapter Summary.....	60
Chapter 4: Discussion.....	62
Approach to Analysis.....	62
My Framing of Witnessing.....	65
A White Settler Emerging Solidarity Practice for Justice-Doing.....	66
Witnessing Intention: Critical Examination of Self.....	67
Witnessing Intention: Reciprocal and Respectful Relationships.....	75
Witnessing Intention: Intersectionality.....	85
Witnessing Intention: Embodied listening.....	88
Witnessing Intention: Honouring Resistance.....	93
Witnessing Intention: Action.....	103
Witnessing Intention: Accountability.....	106
Chapter Summary.....	112
Chapter 5: Recommendations.....	113
Discussion.....	113

Recommendations for Self.....119  
Recommendations for CYC.....121  
Recommendations for Research.....122  
Conclusion.....123  
References.....125  
Appendix A : Participant Consent Form.....144  
Appendix B: Accountability Form.....148

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Me with the first cohort of YFS (2016).....	5
Figure 2. The red dress art piece created by YFD in 2019.....	10
Figure 3. Overt vs Covert White supremacy.....	16
Figure 4. Indicators of White supremacy.....	17
Figure 5: Wheel of Power/Privilege.....	19
Figure 6: A White Settler Emerging Solidarity Practice for Justice-Doing.....	67
Figure 7: Art Reflection on The Shift.....	73
Figure 8: Art Reflection on my Relationship with YFD.....	83
Figure 9: The collaborative art piece.....	96
Figure 10: Community Event on May 5th.....	97
Figure 11: YFD group after unveiling art piece at May 5th event.....	98
Figure 12: How I Enacted my Emerging Solidarity Practice for Justice-Doing.....	115

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This deeply personal work is meant to be a relational conversation. It involves more questions than answers. This study tries to capture the discomfort of precarious ethics and a practice with many contradictions as I traverse through the topics of witnessing, resistance, and where I belong as a White<sup>1</sup> settler in communities of solidarity, as I seek useful ways of being a Child and Youth Care (CYC) practitioner, given my position.

First, I would like to briefly introduce myself for you to locate who I am. By the end of this thesis, I hope that you will know me a bit better. After introducing myself, my social location, positionality, and personal context around my research, I will outline my research question and provide societal context on the topic. I will then describe the purpose and rationale of my thesis, and also define some key terms relevant to my research.

### Who I Am

My full name is Julie Anne Laliberté. On my mother's side I am of Dutch and British heritage. My maternal grandmother came to Canada<sup>2</sup> after World War II in 1948. My maternal grandfather's parents came over from the UK between 1890-1905. On my father's side I am 9<sup>th</sup> generation French Canadian, with my ancestor Bernard Lainé coming to Canada between 1670-1690 from Brittany in Northwest France. Knowledge that my ancestors were here for most of settler/occupier history in Canada has raised questions about who they were as people and tensions around the ways I have benefitted from this

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<sup>1</sup> I intentionally capitalize W in White for racial symmetry, that being White is for racial symmetry, that being White is acknowledged alongside being Black or Indigenous.

<sup>2</sup> I intentionally use lower case letters as a small act to delegitimize the Canadian settler state.

history. Alongside these tensions, I also actively (and imperfectly) contest the violent colonial and settler colonial policies on which Canada is founded.

I was raised in a fairly progressive, happy and healthy middle-class home on the unceded, stolen territories of the W̱SÁNEĆ and lək'wəŋən Peoples, where I currently reside on Vancouver Island. My father moved here from Quebec in 1983 and my mother moved here in 1979 from Saskatchewan. I acknowledge the W̱SÁNEĆ and lək'wəŋən Peoples as rightful stewards of this land and am committed to concrete actions and practices that uphold Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. I also acknowledge the contradiction that I benefit from my parents owning property on stolen land, while also contesting it.

The term *settler*, although commonplace in literature and attached to terms such as settler colonialism, has been critiqued as a passive and “historically sterile” term that conceals the violence of land theft (Ward, 2015, in Mackenzie, 2019). Although not yet mainstream, some use the term *occupier* to more accurately reflect the ongoing violence of people currently residing in Canada. This also includes the Canadian government’s reliance on settler owned and occupied private property to reject Indigenous land claims and to “justify past land theft and to fortify land that is held by settlers” (Jokic, 2020). While I agree the term “settler” is far too benign and passive, for clarity and continuity with literature, I will mostly use it throughout this thesis.

## **My Background**

I was fortunate to have close relationships with my maternal grandparents, or Oma and Opa, who instilled anti-consumerist, anti-capitalist, and environmentalist views that have helped shape who I am today. My Oma Ada Pickford was an activist and involved

in the White social justice community in Victoria BC. I trace a familial connection to justice-seeking and activism back to the Holocaust, when my Oma and her family hid a Jewish person in their home in Nazi-occupied Holland, and that my great aunt was involved in anti-Nazi resistance. I carry this knowledge with me not to absolve myself of White guilt or shirk responsibility, but as a reminder and commitment to accountability and justice in everything I do. My commitment has prompted this thesis to reflect on White settler occupier roles and responsibilities, with particular focus in Indigenous activism.

I come to this work from many points of privilege as a White, middle-class, mostly-abled, neurodivergent, cisgender woman. My relationship with (dis)ability has changed over the past few years, due to chronic pain from a spine injury and a recent diagnosis of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Being neurodivergent means that I can struggle with focus, task initiative, emotional regulation, organization, and memory. At the same time, the strengths of my neurodivergence include creativity, spontaneity, problem-solving skills, and hyperfocus.

The post-secondary education I have received thus far, which was supported both financially and through resources from family, has opened doors to most of my employment opportunities, and also played a part in getting a job with the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS) on unceded Kaska territory in Tets'élūgé<sup>3</sup> (Watson Lake), Yukon, where my research is located. This accrued and continuously compounding generational wealth has been gained from living and profiting from stolen Indigenous lands.

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<sup>3</sup> Kaska name for Watson Lake. Please note that there are many dialects of Kaska and spelling may vary between dialects. I use the spelling provided by the Elders in the program.

I am acutely aware of the contradiction of locating myself in the centre of a thesis that challenges White centrality. As the reader will find, the complexities inherent in this contradiction are messy, and ironic. But it is not beyond any individual to unpack and even to use this messiness to help repair the damage White society has caused. This thesis is my attempt to do so. As readers will find, this iterative research is meant as *one* possible opening or gateway to meeting the precarious messiness of solidarity.

### **Connection to LAWS**

In 2015, I was put in touch with Ann Maje Raider, the executive director of LAWS, by Dr. Allan Wade, who has been working with LAWS for approximately 25 years. I was living on the territories of the Kwanlin Dun First Nation and Ta'an Kwach'an Council in Whitehorse, Yukon (where I lived from 2014-2020), and had just started working at the Yukon Women's Transition Home. Allan knew of my facilitation experience and work with youth and victims of violence; he thought I would be a good fit to facilitate a program with youth on gendered violence and activism called Youth for Safety (YFS) in Tets'élūgé (Watson Lake), a five hour drive from Whitehorse. After speaking on the phone, Ann invited me to co-facilitate the three-year program, YFS, with my manager at the transition home, Renée Claude Carrier, who is Innu from Quebec. Although I initially told Ann I could only commit to the program for the first year as I wanted to begin graduate school the following year, during that first year I realized that I felt very connected and wanted to see the project through to its completion in 2018. Throughout the years, I have worked for LAWS in a number of roles including program design, curriculum development and program evaluation. Renée and I now co-facilitate a five-

year program that started in 2019 called Youth for Dignity (YFD) or Ts'ídāne ā' nezen<sup>4</sup> in Kaska, in which my research is nested. This work and connection to LAWS, which I initially thought was going to be a volunteer experience, profoundly changed my life, shaping who I am today and my research.

**Figure 1: Me with the first cohort of YFS (2016)**



### Positionality

My positionality<sup>5</sup> is directly influenced by my social location of being a White, privileged, educated, middle-class, neurodivergent, cisgender woman with mostly able-bodied privilege. No amount of “allyship”, intersectionality, wealth redistribution, or active solidarity will ever dissolve my privilege, nor absolve me of responsibility to fight for a just society. Akin to what Kouri (2019) states, I benefit financially and socially from

<sup>4</sup> Spelling may vary among Kaska dialects. I use the spelling provided by the Elders in YFD.

<sup>5</sup> The social and political contexts that form identities

Indigenous and racialized bodies. I can position myself alongside marginalized communities but my *position* will always stay as an outsider to racialized communities. The use of critical autoethnography as a research methodology is intentional to keep the focus on my own experience. I am drawn to the work on *orientations* by Sarah Ahmed (2006), and to look at where I have come from, where I am now, where I am going, and also what my business is on these lands/with this community, what I am turned towards, what have I turned my back to, *how* I navigate, and the ways in which I am disoriented or lost (Ahmed, 2006).

Although I have developed relationships within the community for the past six years and am embedded as a facilitator in YFD, I define my positionality with community in this research as *outsider* first because I will never fully understand the structural violence or racism that the Kaska community and Indigenous participants face and second, I do not live in the community or the Yukon. I share closer positionality with the non-Indigenous participants and our shared experience as White settlers working from a stance of witness. However, there are important distinctions between being raised in the rural north and the urban south, where I come from. In the rural north, White settlers are living within predominantly Indigenous communities with some form of Indigenous governance, and connections to land, language and culture are present. Whereas in the urban south, Indigenous peoples comprise less than 4% of the population and White settlers can manoeuvre daily life without limited awareness of or connection to Indigenous peoples, land, language and culture.

I hope this acknowledgement of my outsider position serve as reminders to be tentative in any assumptions I may make as a researcher. I also want to stay troubled and

unsettled, and practice a *pedagogy of discomfort* (Regan, 2010) in this process, as justice and solidarity is “...not a comfortable place with a promise of an easy fix or simple redress and reconciliation. Comfort in disquiet is required to find a different way forward” (Chadwick, 2019, p.112). I want to be very clear about what stories are mine to share, and what are not.

### **Description of Problem/Issue**

The literature regarding harm by White researchers *on* Indigenous and other marginalized communities is ample (Tuck, 2009). Further, a body of research by Indigenous researchers that speaks back to this harm with respectful, ethical engagement, grounded in Indigenous worldviews and that centers the voices of Indigenous communities is growing (Clark, 2016b; Hunt, 2014; Simpson, 2017; Tuck, 2009). Because of this, I have been drawn to shifting the focus of my research, interventions, and practice *away* from marked or marginalized communities and *towards* Whiteness, White supremacy, and White settler communities/practitioners (Kouri, 2019).

I began this research with the idea that I wanted to do critical Participatory Action Research (PAR) with the participants of the group I facilitate for LAWS, Youth For Dignity (YFD), which includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth and Elders in Kaska territory, Yukon. I initially thought that by doing respectful, critical Participatory Action Research with a community I am in relationship with, I could avoid some of the typical harmful pitfalls that happen with a White researcher such as White saviourism and paternalism. As I got further into the process and in conversation with my research committee, I began to listen more to the persistent inkling that something wasn't quite right. In collaboration with my committee, I decided to listen to this feeling, and instead

shifted the primary focus away from community to look at myself and probe the role of White settler CYC practitioners who are attempting to be in solidarity with Indigenous and other marginalized and oppressed communities. This follows work by other White settlers (Hurwitz, 2017; Kouri, 2019; MacKenzie, 2019; McGuire & Denis, 2019) who target Whiteness in their research have decided to “hold a mirror up to ourselves” (Brechtbill, 2020, p. 34).

I landed on using arts-based critical autoethnography to do this personal work, and draw from Vikki Reynolds’ (Reynolds, 2010a, 2010b, 2012) work on justice-doing work using a witnessing stance including her article *Doing Justice: A Witnessing Stance in Therapeutic Work alongside Survivors of Torture and Political Violence* to develop my emerging solidarity practice. Reynolds’ invites practitioners to articulate their own paths to justice-doing in community practice. This approach recognizes that to create change, it’s important to look at *who* is the perpetrator of violence and *who* has a vested interest in maintaining oppressive societal conditions (Reynolds, 2020). The aim is to create an accountability framework for myself and other White settler practitioners seeking to change oppressive systems, *not* to make me feel ‘good’ about my work, or as a function of “settler moves to innocence” (Reynolds, 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

### **Context**

I will draw from my experience facilitating YFD to engage this research. YFD is a program grounded in Kaska culture, dignity, and activism that engages Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth with social justice issues such as gendered violence and racism. YFD is comprised of around fifteen youth and 2-4 Kaska Elders who meet during the school year on a monthly basis, for three days at a time in the local high school, where

topics are explored and social actions are planned and carried out. I have been working for LAWS since 2015 and have developed relationships with the Elders, community members, and youth. The accountability I have as a White settler to these relationships I have developed over the past six years is central to my ethics in the research (Chadwick, 2019b).

This research project is a follow up to a past art piece we created in 2019 (Figure 2) on MMIWGT2S+. Youth and Elders constructed a life-sized red dress made out of scraps of red dresses and fabric, traditional smoked moose hide, fur, and 43 blessed tobacco ties representing the 42 MMIWGT2S+ in the Yukon plus one for all those unaccounted for. The youth, Elders, and community members wrote down on the strips of red fabric the names of any Indigenous loved ones who had been murdered or taken and invited community members to do the same. The red dress is now on permanent display in a glass case at the Watson Lake Secondary School.

**Figure 2: The red dress art piece created by YFD in 2019**



***YFD and MMIWGT2S+***

YFD was created to address the issue of gendered violence, with a focus on MMIWGT2S+. The language and terminology on MMIWGT2S+ are shifting to acknowledge that violence is not only directed at cisgendered Indigenous women, but also directed at trans, non-binary, and two-spirit peoples. The acronyms MMIP (Missing and Murdered Indigenous People), or MMIR (Murdered and Missing Indigenous Relatives), are also used to include the violence that men, boys, or other non-binary Indigenous people face (Woodward, 2022). It was difficult to land on the “right”

terminology for this research, and to consider the need to be inclusive and intersectional. I decided to use MMIWGT2S+ in my research as this is the acronym we use in YFD.

It is important to distinguish MMIWGT2S+ from gendered violence in general as a specific tool of colonialism and ongoing settler colonialism. Colonialism is defined as the process of invasion and establishment of control over Indigenous peoples and their lands (LaRocque, 2006, in Harding, 2018). The Doctrine of Discovery drives colonialism and is the belief in the domination of Eurocentric, Christian ideology over others, and the drive to “vanquish or convert the non-Christian kingdoms while exploring the world” (Wright Cardinal, 2017, p. 5). Historically, the perpetrators of colonialism have been European nations invading and stealing land on other continents (Reading, 2013, in Harding, 2018). Globally, our violent history with colonialism started in 1492 and includes genocide, biological warfare, slavery, land theft, and forced indoctrination (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012)

Settler colonialism can be defined as “settlers’ ongoing occupation of Indigenous territory and the transformation of social structures, institutions, and relations therein; the elimination of Indigenous Peoples through warfare, displacement, and assimilation; and the (re)production of narratives that normalise, justify, and legitimise settler belonging to the land” (Chen, 2021, p. 745; Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012). (p.745). One of its tactics is to remain invisible, covert, and natural so that anything that resists it or deviates from it appears to be in the wrong (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

Colonialism is commonly referred to as a “thing of the past”, or an event that happened a long time ago (Tuck & Yang, 2012). It is vital to resist and challenge these narratives and name the ongoing genocidal and violent policies and practices that

continue to harm Indigenous peoples and communities. Canadian society's lack of understanding and education on colonialism and settler colonialism is no coincidence: the Canadian settler state continually attempts to cover its tracks by hiding the intentionality behind its actions.

The 2019 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people found that Indigenous women and girls in Canada face genocidal rates of violence, with homicide rates nearly seven times higher than non-Indigenous women and girls, and sexualized assault rates being three times higher (Government of Canada, 2015, 2019b). In addition, Northern Canada has the highest rates of gendered violence in Canada (Government of Canada, 2019a). The issue of MMIWG2S+ is a function of settler colonialism and is directly connected to land theft (Clark, 2016b; Hunt, 2016). "The Indian Act is a patriarchal system that dismantles Indigenous systems of governance that center women's leadership and matriarchal structures" (S. Wright Cardinal, personal communication, July 11, 2021). This, among many other violent tactics such as the Residential School system, which was legislated within the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop and current child welfare system, is one of the key tactics used in land theft, displacing Indigenous families, and attempting to legitimize the Canadian state (Clark, 2016; Hunt, 2016). While also contesting them, I place myself in direct relationship to these lethal realities, as a White settler benefiting in health and prosperity from this ongoing violence.

### **Purpose & Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore witnessing as potentially useful for settler solidarity and practice, and how art can act as co-witness or co-conspirator. My research

explores how witnessing from a White settler lens could be a useful gateway for White settlers who attempt to be in solidarity with oppressed communities to “co-create a society in which everyone experiences justice” (Reynolds, 2013, p. 67). My purpose is not to find a framework to settle into or to become comfortable with: I aim to help create a more just world with settler accountability. Another purpose is to resist and refuse historic and ongoing colonial violence collectively through art making with youth, Elders, and facilitators (Chadwick, 2019b).

The YFD project that my research is rooted in hopes to strengthen connections between youth and Elders, and to explore the different roles non-Indigenous and Indigenous participants can have in social justice actions, specifically the crisis of MMIWGT2S+. I look at the relationship between witnessing, art, my experience as a White settler, and my work with YFD and the creation of a collaborative art piece by youth and Elders in response to Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, Trans and 2-Spirit people (MMIWGT2S+).

My research explores the questions: **In what ways can witnessing function as a useful practice framework for White settler solidarity? Secondly, how can art act as witness or co-conspirator<sup>6</sup>?**

A basic understanding of witnessing is: an embodied listening practice that includes a requirement for action, and to “move beyond the hearing of individual pain to a collective response-ability” (Hunt, 2014; Reynolds, 2010a, p. 162). This research weaves together practice, research, and solidarity, and articulates witnessing as a

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<sup>6</sup> Co-conspirator refers to a term for an ally/someone in solidarity who is willing to take risks and give up privilege in their attempts at solidarity (Indigenous Action, 2014)

potential pathway to *justice-doing*<sup>7</sup> (Reynolds, 2010b, 2019). I am also interested in understanding the ways art-making contributes to solidarity efforts.

Hunt (2014) reminds us of the requirement to bear witness to the epistemic violence of forgetting certain stories such as MMIWGT2S+, and which stories get forgotten, or not paid attention to. This research will explore how witnessing could be a helpful practice and research framework for non-Indigenous CYC practitioners in solidarity with Indigenous communities or perhaps offers a “place to stand” for those attempting to be in solidarity (Reynolds, 2010a).

### **Rationale**

Research on Northern Indigenous communities, which are often “over researched but underseen” (Tuck, 2009, p. 412), must be reflexive and responsive to the needs of that community (Smith, 2012). Many studies focus on pathologizing the pain and suffering of youth and Indigenous communities (N. Clark, 2016b; Tuck, 2009). In contrast, this project centers a useful praxis framework and a hopeful and helpful exploration of White settler solidarity.

This research will contribute to broader social change by helping me and potentially other White settler CYC practitioners become more useful in solidarity efforts to create a more just society, and increase the resistance against state violence, genocide and MMIWGT2S+. It also has the potential to deepen the understanding White settler CYC practitioners have about their own racial identities and accountabilities as White settlers engaged with solidarity. Furthermore, there is limited research on the connection between witnessing, art, and the creation of White settler accountability frameworks as a

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<sup>7</sup> Reynolds uses both the terms *justice-doing* and *doing-justice* in her work. I have chosen to go with *justice-doing*, as that is how Reynolds frames it in her more recent work.

tool to become more useful in solidarity efforts. The numbers of White settler CYC professionals who want to work in solidarity with oppressed communities are growing and this research invites others to join (Reynolds, 2012).

### **Unsettling key terms**

I provide a list of key terms and concepts below to help frame the reader's understanding of the purpose and importance of my research, specifically the proposed Witnessing framework. In some cases, I use visual representations to communicate the ideas behind the concepts. Some concepts explored in my research are not intuitive or easily understood: I invite the reader to lean into the grey area of uncertainty or discomfort when confronted with the less tangible aspects of my research.

### ***White Supremacy***

Just as colonialism and settler colonialism are overarching realities that are at the root of almost all problems in Canada, White supremacy is a racist ideology that is at the centre of Canadian society (Saad, 2020). White supremacy is the belief that White people are superior and at the top of the hierarchical pyramid above other races, and therefore should dominate (Saad, 2020). The origin of White supremacy is in scientific racism, in which 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> century scientists, anthropologists, doctors, and historians concocted theories about how White people were racially superior to all other races. Scientific racism had a stronghold in academia for over 200 years and white supremacy continues to inform policy and legislation today (Jackson & Weidman, 2005; Sarah Wright Cardinal, personal communication, April 7, June 13, 2022).

White supremacy is not just an ideology; it influences how “systems and institutions are structured to uphold this White dominance” (Saad, 2020). Often, White

supremacy is thought of only as motivating far-right extremists and neo-Nazis, instead of the foundational ideology on which Canada and North America<sup>8</sup> were created (Saad, 2020)). Figure 3 below describes some of the overt and covert examples of White supremacy (Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence, 2005).

**Figure 3: Overt and Covert White Supremacy**



<sup>8</sup> I intentionally use lower case letters for North America in the same way I use lower case c in Canada: as a small act to delegitimize these states.

### *Indicators of White Supremacy*

To build on the overt and covert examples of White supremacy, I also provide a figure (4) below listing common indicators of White supremacy that are found almost everywhere: in practice, organizations, policies, etc (Unsettling Minnesota, 2010). This image was based on the work of Tema Okun from the document *Unsettling Minnesota* (2010).

**Figure 4: Indicators of White Supremacy**



### *White Privilege*

In 1988, Peggy McIntosh coined the term *White privilege* to describe an “invisible backpack of unearned assets that White people rely on daily but are oblivious to”

(Mackenzie, 2019, p.15; McIntosh, 1988). Drawing from Kimmel (2003), Kraemer (2007) describes privilege as “the equivalent of an invisible ‘headwind’ that pushes us along without our conscious knowledge. We only become aware of the advantage we receive from this push if we turn our faces into the wind” (p. 43). Although Whiteness/race is one of the most powerful identities due to White supremacy, other points of identity are subject to privilege and oppression, represented in the visual below (Figure 5). The identities at the centre of the wheel represent those with most power.

Sonya Renee Taylor (2020) writes that as soon as we try to position ourselves above others, no matter our social positioning and lack of privilege, that we subscribe to the White supremacist delusion of hierarchal thinking and domination. She explains that we must destroy the “ladder” of White supremacy, the idea that there are any other bodies and beings that are less than you. She urges that “we will never dismantle White supremacy and hold on to fat phobia, ableism, ageism, homophobia. They all must go” (S. R. Taylor, 2020).

Figure 5: Wheel of Power/Privilege



### *Resistance*

A resistance approach maintains that wherever there is violence or oppression, there is also a parallel story of resistance (Reynolds, 2020; Richardson & Bonnah, 2015; Richardson & Reynolds, 2012; Wade, 1997). This approach argues that victims always resist, and that resistance should not be measured by its ability to stop the violence, but as a way to maintain a connection to ones' humanity and keep a "fingerhold" on dignity (Reynolds, 2020). Métis and Cree scholar and activist Cathy Richardson defines resistance as "any act through which a person strives to maintain their dignity, connection, relationship, culture and family against forms of oppression, real or anticipated" (in Reed, 2021, p. 149).

A focus on resistance is a main principle in Response Based Practice (RBP) and is a different lens than looking at people as passive or deficient in the face of trauma (Reynolds, 2020; Richardson & Bonnah, 2015; Wade, 1997). RBP is a lens for working with people that focuses on power, oppression, and context, and its main principles include: wherever there is violence there is resistance; violence is unilateral (not a mutual act); and violence is deliberate (perpetrators of violence anticipate resistance from their victims and take specific steps to suppress and conceal violence) (Coates & Wade, 2007; Richardson & Reynolds, 2012; Wade, 1997). RBP resists pathologizing victims by focusing on what they have done to resist or maintain their dignity in the face of violence instead of the symptoms of the violence (Richardson & Bonnah, 2015; Wade, 1997).

Youth For Dignity is grounded in RBP and uses its main principles to guide curriculum. Cathy Richardson and Allan Wade, who were foundational in the creation of RBP, also work for the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society. Vikki Reynolds (2010a, 2020) takes a similar position on the usefulness of honouring resistance as well as the pain of survivors of violence or torture. The ubiquity of resistance from the RBP lens is drawn from Foucault's work (1979) and is also found in Indigenous scholarship such as Leanne Simpson's (2011) work on Indigenous resurgence. Simpson (2011) states that "As long as there has been colonialism on our lands, there has been resistance" (p.101). With roots in Sandy Grande's (2004) work on *Red Pedagogy* and Fanon's (1963) work on resistance in *Wretched of the Earth*, there are many Indigenous scholars writing and theorizing about resistance both in academia and in grey literature (Clark, 2016a; Corntassel, 2018; de Finney et al., 2018; Smith, 2012; Tuck, 2009). Although my research is largely focused on my experience as a White settler, I do draw from my role

as YFD facilitator which involves mostly Indigenous participants. I use a resistance approach in my work as a White settler to refuse the deficit-based trauma narratives that are often used when discussing Indigenous peoples and communities (Clark, 2016b; Reynolds, 2020; Tuck, 2009). Understanding White supremacy, privilege and resistance is key in framing this research, and unsettling my own White settler solidarity.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this first chapter I have introduced myself and my social location, the relationship I have with LAWS and YFD, and the context surrounding my research questions. I have outlined the purpose and rationale of my research, and also provided some key terms pertinent to this thesis. In the next chapter I will provide my theoretical lenses that inform how I show up in this work, and a literature review on White settler solidarity and witnessing.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The aim of my research is to explore witnessing as a solidarity framework for White settlers. Thus, the literature review will begin with the theoretical lenses that inform how I engage with solidarity. This chapter will look at White settler solidarity, followed by a shorter section on the concept of witnessing. For the review on White settler solidarity, I used the UVIC library search engine and input key terms such as “White solidarity frameworks”, “White allyship”, “solidarity framework” to form the literature review. I also looked at articles written by authors commonly sourced throughout the literature I was reading. For my review of the witnessing literature, I drew from a previously conducted literature review on witnessing that I completed during my CYC course work.

### **Theoretical lenses of my Praxis Framework**

This section on theoretical lenses will outline my praxis framework, which draws from three main lenses: critical race theory (CRT), intersectional feminism, and anti-oppressive praxis. These lenses not only inform how I approach my research question but also how I view the world and my own practice.

A praxis framework weaves together theory, practice, and a fulsome understanding of self, and is a foundational principle in CYC (MacKenzie, 2019; White, 2007). The concept of praxis, which originates in Greek philosophy, was extensively written about by Friere (1970) in the context of emancipatory education, highlighting its importance in “making a difference in the world” (in White, 2007). Jennifer White (2007), who has theorized extensively about praxis in CYC, defines it as “ethical, self-

aware, responsive and accountable action, which reflects dimensions of knowing, doing and being” (p. 226). The importance of keeping praxis evolving to meet the shifting and complex needs of CYC practice has been made clear by several scholars (de Finney et al., 2018; Loiselle et al., 2012; MacKenzie, 2019; Saraceno, 2012).

My praxis framework, “the place where words and actions, discourses and experience merge” is fluid and interconnected with my positionality, life experience, the philosophies, ontology, and theories that I draw from (Stacey, 2001; in White, 2007, p. 226). The collective and imperfect aim of my praxis framework is an attempt to “divest” from the impacts of White supremacy on my life (Barber & Benson, 2020). My praxis framework has been shaped and guided by the labour of racialized scholars, activists, and thinkers, and I am building on the work of White scholars such as Scott Kouri, Kaz Mckenzie, and Vikki Reynolds. Here I weave together the theoretical lenses that I align with including critical race theory, intersectional feminism, and anti-oppressive praxis (Ahmed, 2006). What I strive to “turn toward” or examine is a non-pathologizing stance that looks at White-supremacy and oppression as a marker of illness or deficiency instead of viewing a marked or oppressed person as being deficient (Kouri, 2019; Reynolds, 2020).

### **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

My thesis engages with a deep critical examination of self as White settler, including unpacking and critiquing Whiteness and White supremacy. This critical examination has roots in CRT, which can be understood generally as “studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado, 2017, p. 3).

CRT emerged in the 1970s out of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States in legal studies (Delgado, 2017; Taylor, 1998). The founding voices of CRT include “self-described outsider law teachers” Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Lani Guinier, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams, and Kimberle Crenshaw, who met in 1989 to address race-related issues in legal studies and the law such as disproportionate sentencing of racialized people in the legal system and affirmative action (Taylor, 1998, p. 122). Since then it has rapidly spread beyond that discipline to include other fields like education, political science, sociology (Delgado, 2017; Lynn & Dixon, 2022; Taylor, 1998).

The seminal voices mentioned above provided a much needed assessment of the racial realities in a North American context (Delgado, 2017; Harding, 2018; Taylor, 1998). The main critiques that CRT presents are: exposing the hierarchical violence of White supremacy; naming that racism does not only exist between individuals and that systemic racism is solidly implanted in our society to oppress racialized people; that race is a social construct and not based in science, further denouncing scientific racism, and challenges the idea that locates the experiences of White people as the objective truth and normative standard (Delgado, 2017; Taylor, 1998).

My research centers on critically examining my own Whiteness from my position as White settler, and there have been a number of White scholars who have employed CRT in their work on critically addressing their own Whiteness alongside seminal Black and racialized scholars. These include White scholarship such as: Peggy McIntosh’s (1989) *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*; Paulette Regan’s (2010) book *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and*

*Reconciliation in Canada*; Robin Diangelo's (2018) book *White Fragility: Why it's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*; and my thesis committee member Laurie Harding's (2018) dissertation on *What's the Harm? Examining the Stereotyping of Indigenous Peoples in Health Systems*. These works discuss some key aspects of critically unpacking Whiteness from the perspectives of a White settler such as White Guilt, White Fragility, and the White Saviour complex, which will be discussed in my review of literature on White settler solidarity below. Kimberlé Crenshaw, one of the early scholars of CRT, brought an important intersectional feminist critique to CRT, which is the next theoretical lens I will describe.

### **Intersectional feminism**

Black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality, which considers how multiple points of identity (such as gender, race, ability, class, and sexuality) interact and influence experiences, power, and oppression. bell hooks (1986), as well as other Black feminists as early as the 1960's, informed the study of Intersectionality with the critique of the exclusion of Black women from the predominantly White feminist movements (Carlson et al., 2019; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality acknowledges that everyone has unique experiences of privilege and discrimination. For example, even though White and Black women may share the commonality of gender, their experiences of privilege and oppression will vary greatly because of their race.

It is not enough for me to be feminist and to consider only the oppression of women. I use an intersectional praxis, meaning intersectional feminism is not only a theory or approach, but a way of *being with* research and practice (Hankivsky et. al.,

2010 in Reed, 2021). A mantra that captures my view on the importance of intersectionality, solidarity, accountability, and being aware of who have I turned my back on is: “groundless solidarity and infinite responsibility” (Richard Day, p.18, as cited in Reynolds, 2010). This represents my desire not to leave anyone behind in the revolution and to understand my place. It also speaks to the limitless possibilities of with whom you can be in solidarity.

### **Anti-Oppressive Praxis**

Anti-oppressive praxis is a way to tackle intersectional oppression and take stock of power, privilege, inequality and violence (Dalrymple, 2006). Multiple identities (such as race, class, ability, gender, sex, etc.) result in oppression and violence under colonial and White supremacist society (Dominelli & Campling, 2002; Eaves & Al-Hindi, 2020). Different identities can cause people to experience sometimes overlapping and sometimes distinct forms of violence and oppression. Dominelli and Campling (2002) name oppression as a system that divides people into dominant/superior and subordinate/inferior. They also use an intersectional approach that goes beyond the binary thinking of someone as either the oppressor or oppressed. Drawing from Taylor (2020), my anti-oppressive praxis includes fighting against all the “isms” and “obias” such as racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, fat phobia, etc. while recognizing that racism is the most violent form of oppression and Canada has racist legislation to manage and surveil Indigenous bodies. These three theoretical lenses: Critical Race Theory, intersectional feminism, and anti-oppressive praxis shape my praxis framework. Next, I will provide a review of the literature on White settler solidarity and witnessing.

## **White Settler Solidarity**

Solidarity is a social principle that bonds people together in a supportive relationship with a shared struggle, such as the liberation of an oppressed group (K. T. Brown & Ostrove, 2013; Kraemer, 2007). Although I have intentionally chosen to use the term solidarity instead of “allyship” in my thesis, the language of “ally” is still very much present in discourse and literature, and therefore is necessary to include in my review. Furthermore, it was easier to locate research on White settler solidarity frameworks by using the language of allyship. I noticed that I found more relevant articles when I used the term ally or allyship instead of solidarity. For this reason, I will use the terms solidarity and allyship somewhat interchangeably in this chapter and based on the sources usage while discussing the critiques on allyship below.

Research on solidarity and allyship predominantly lands in the fields of education, counselling, sociology, social work, history, and political science (C. Clark, 2010; Curnow & Helferty, 2018; Louis et al., 2019; Morgan & Pulignano, 2020; Reason & Broido, 2005; Subašić et al., 2008). I will be focusing primarily on the concept of social solidarity. The literature suggests that the study of social solidarity stems from the long-standing interest of social psychologists to examine the interactions between dominant or advantaged groups and non-dominant or disadvantaged groups (K. T. Brown & Ostrove, 2013). That being said, the roots of solidarity existed in social movements and grassroots organizing long before the concept of solidarity started to be examined in Eurocentric research and academia (Selvanathan et al., 2020). Next I will discuss the terminology of solidarity vs. allyship, followed by outlining some critiques of White settler allyship and solidarity.

### **Solidarity vs. Allyship**

There is much debate and discussion around the terminology of allyship, informed by critiques on the discourse of allyship (which are outlined in the section after this) (Carlson et al., 2019; Clemens, 2017; Indigenous Action, 2014; Kraemer, 2007; Louis et al., 2019; MacKenzie, 2019; Ostrove et al., 2019; Reynolds, 2013; Selvanathan et al., 2020; Walia, 2012). Solidarity is one of the terms that emerged from this critique as a possible replacement for allyship, as well as the newer terms “co-conspirators/accomplices” (Carlson et al., 2019; Clemens, 2017; Indigenous Action, 2014), and “co-resistors” (Flowers, 2015).

Although some of the literature used the terms somewhat interchangeably, some scholars differentiated between allyship and solidarity (Louis et al., 2019; Selvanathan et al., 2020; Subašić et al., 2008). Louis et al., (2019) proposes that although solidarity and allyship may describe the same behaviour, they are enacted for different motives. The authors frame allyship as having self-serving motives, where the advantaged group acts to meet their own goals, whereas solidarity is based on a shared common superordinate identity between the advantaged and disadvantaged groups.

### **Critiques and Common Pitfalls of Settler Justice-Doing**

There are several critiques of allyship that must be taken into account to not perpetuate the very colonial harms (despite best intentions) that are trying to be avoided in attempts at solidarity (Carlson et al., 2019). The section below outlines some critiques and common pitfalls found in the literature.

### ***Identity vs. Action***

One of the most common critiques of allyship across the literature is how “ally” has become an identity (often self-proclaimed) instead of an action with a set of expectations and responsibilities, and has been commodified and co-opted by the mainstream that it has been rendered meaningless, “disembodied from any real mutual understanding of support” (Carlson et al., 2019; Clemens, 2017; Curnow & Helferty, 2018; Delfino, 2021; Flowers, 2015; Indigenous Action, 2014, para. 4; Kraemer, 2007; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This is especially important as we see the “politics of reconciliation being consumed by the Canadian state while at the same time doing little/nothing to destabilize the status quo” (Coulthard et al. 2014; Simpson 2011, 2017; Whetung 2016 in Curnow & Helferty, 2018, p. 156). This focus on action is taken up by Vikki Reynolds and her work on *justice-doing* (Reynolds, 2013, 2019). Diverse voices from the literature all echo that these responsibilities are *ongoing* and unconditional (Arvin et al., 2013; Curnow & Helferty, 2018; de Finney et al., 2018; De Lissovoy & Brown, 2013; Flowers, 2015; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; MacKenzie, 2019; Razack, 2002; Reynolds, 2010b, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

### ***Settler Moves to Innocence***

Tuck and Yang’s (2012) seminal paper *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor* outlines five “settler moves to innocence” that provide clear critiques on things settlers do to find relief or mercy from the guilt of colonialism without giving up land, resources, power, or privilege. Although their paper is aimed at settlers in general and not specifically “allies”, the information is very applicable to “allies”. Tuck and Yang provide this framework so “that we can be more impatient with each other, less likely to accept gestures and half-

steps, and more willing to press for acts which unsettle innocence” (p.10). Tuck and Yang credit Janet Mawhinney’s writing on *moves to innocence* about self proclaimed White anti-racists and strategies used to “remove involvement in and culpability for systems of domination” (Mawhinney, 1998, p. 17). Mawhinney’s work was built on Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack’s (1998) theorizing of “the race to innocence”, where women consider their oppression as “most urgent” over other identities, and that they are also “unimplicated in the subordination of other women” (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 335, in Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Tuck and Yang present six moves to innocence: (1) settler nativism (in which settlers create or locate a distant ancestor who is rumoured to be Indigenous to mark ourselves blameless); (2) fantasizing adoption by an Indigenous community; (3) colonial equivocation (the ambiguous or vague use of the word colonialism that erases the specificity, scope and violence of colonialism and settler colonialism); (4) conscientization (focusing solely on raising awareness and forgetting about giving land back); (5) at risk-ing/asterisk-ing Indigenous peoples (labelling Indigenous peoples “at risk” or vulnerable without naming the colonial violence that has created the harm); (6) re-occupation and urban homesteading (when settlers “play Indian” and build on stolen land they consider a “vast, uninhabited wilderness”. Reading Tuck and Yang’s settler moves to innocence has been foundational in my understanding of solidarity and serve as constant ethical reminders. Next I will outline three other pitfalls that White settlers create: the White saviour complex, White guilt, and White fragility.

### ***White Saviour Complex***

White settler “narratives of good intentions and benevolence have been a historical foundation of White settler identity formation” (Srivastava, 2005; Regan, 2010; in Hunt & Holmes, 2015, p. 164). The White saviour complex is grounded in White supremacy and the belief that we as White people/oppressors have the unique power to save, uplift, and strengthen the “oppressed class” (MacKenzie, 2019; Saad, 2020; Straubhaar, 2015). Nigerian-american writer Teju Cole (2012) coined the term “White Saviour Industrial Complex” to explain that White saviourism is reinforced by systems and institutions. Examples of White saviourism include White people going on volunteer trips to racialized countries in the spirit of “helping”; centering Whiteness and stepping in to speak on behalf of racialized peoples; White people centering themselves as “heroes” in their allyship or solidarity (Saad, 2020). The literature on allyship warns about paternalism and “saviour-style approaches...which reinforce historical tropes of group domination” (Kraemer, 2007; Louis et al., 2019, p. 8; Saad, 2020).

### ***White Guilt***

The concept of White guilt was first introduced in 1965 by James Baldwin in his essay *The White Man's Guilt* and can be understood as White people feeling shame or guilt about the violent actions of their “ingroup”. Other early writings on White guilt include Audre Lorde (1984) and bell hooks (1990), who explain that White guilt is performative and does nothing to actually change oppressive conditions or White supremacy, and often re-centers Whiteness in the process (DiAngelo, 2018; MacKenzie, 2019; Selvanathan et al., 2020; Walia, 2012). Judith Katz (1978) was perhaps one of the first White scholars to write about White guilt in her book on White anti-racism training

and described “self-indulgent White guilt fixations”, and how White guilt often meant White people focused on seeking forgiveness instead of acting to change beliefs or societal conditions. White settler scholar Hurwitz (2017) describes that the paralysis settler society feels from the magnitude of the violence committed against Indigenous peoples is a significant barrier to collective responsibility that must be overcome. Walia (2012) describes this guilt as “a state of self-absorption that actually upholds privilege. While guilt is often a sign of a much-needed shift in consciousness, in itself it does nothing to motivate the responsibility necessary to actively dismantle entrenched systems of oppression” (n.p). White guilt is connected to White fragility, which will be explained next.

### ***White Fragility***

Coined by White scholar Robin DiAngelo in 2011 (DiAngelo, 2018; Parasram, 2019), white fragility refers to the “thin skin” that White people have when it comes to “an interruption to what is racially familiar”, resulting in a range of defensive and harmful behaviours and feelings such as anger, fear, guilt, crying, calling the police, or silence (DiAngelo, 2018; Parasram, 2019, p. 195). This harmful behaviour fuels White supremacy and puts the lives of POC in danger (DiAngelo, 2018; Parasram, 2019). A lack of action, settler moves to innocence, White saviourism, White guilt, and White fragility are all common pitfalls that are important to be aware of in White settler solidarity. Next, key qualities of White solidarity will be discussed.

### **Qualities of Solidarity/Allyship**

The following section outlines some common qualities of White solidarity and allyship found across the literature: action, having a critical self awareness and structural

analysis, the importance of relationality, amplifying marginalized voices, and accountability.

### ***Action***

One of perhaps the most strongly communicated qualities of solidarity and allyship found across the literature was how solidarity must include action (Bishop, 2002; K. T. Brown & Ostrove, 2013; Carlson et al., 2019; Clemens, 2017; Flowers, 2015; hooks, 1986; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Indigenous Action, 2014; Katz, 1978; Kivel, 2002; Kraemer, 2007; Louis et al., 2019; Regan, 2010; Reynolds, 2019; Selvanathan et al., 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Walia, 2012). hooks (1986) and others remind us that these actions and responsibilities must be ongoing and unconditional (Arvin et al., 2013; Flowers, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Walia, 2012).

The literature is clear about the necessity of action, perhaps because one of the main critiques of allyship and solidarity is about the reluctance of some White settlers to actually *do* anything, or give up any of their privilege or power (Curnow & Helferty, 2018; Delfino, 2021; Flowers, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Leveraging privilege is an example from the literature of an action that White settlers can engage with (Flowers, 2015; Indigenous Action, 2014; Kivel, 2002; Kraemer, 2007; MacKenzie, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This entails not only knowing when to use the safety and privilege we as White settlers have, but also figuring out what resources we are actually willing to give up. (Flowers, 2015; Indigenous Action, 2014; Kivel, 2002; Kraemer, 2007; MacKenzie, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Flowers (2015) names a tension here and points out the paradox of White settlers putting themselves on the line, such as being needed in front line arrestable positions, while also pointing out that White settlers have the privilege of

being arrested with the understanding that their lives will not be threatened like their Indigenous and BPOC counterparts.

### ***Critical Self-awareness and Structural Analysis***

The importance of a robust critical analysis and understanding of self was present in almost all of the material I reviewed (Bishop, 2002; Carlson et al., 2019; Chadwick, 2019b; Clemens, 2017; Curnow & Helferty, 2018; Harding, 2018; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Katz, 1978; Kivel, 2002; MacKenzie, 2019; Regan, 2010; Reynolds, 2013; Saad, 2020; Saraceno, 2012). The literature was clear that an intersectional understanding of not only who we are and the privileges we may have, but also how those privileges intersect with societal structural oppression is vital to avoid perpetuating colonial violence and falling into “settler moves to innocence” that keep dominant power systems intact (Curnow & Helferty, 2018; Kraemer, 2007; Louis et al., 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Kraemer (2007) points out that this critical self-reflection and structural analysis must also be applied when considering “intramovement dynamics” within solidarity actions or communities.

### ***Relationality***

Another central quality of solidarity found in the literature is the importance of relationships (hooks, 1986; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Katz, 1978; Kraemer, 2007; Louis et al., 2019; Selvanathan et al., 2020). Making a personal connection, friendship, being trustworthy, sharing similar experiences or interests, and building long-term connections were all relational aspects of being in solidarity from the literature (Brown & Ostrove, 2013; Carlson et al., 2019; hooks, 1986; Louis et al., 2019; Ostrove et al., 2019; Walia, 2012). Being in relationship with someone also fosters accountability: if you care about the person you are attempting to be in solidarity with, you will want to do right by them

(Walia, 2012). In their article on White settler pathways to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, McGuire and Denis (2019) speak on the importance of *meaningful intergroup contact, or engagement across difference* as one of the six pathways they identify as important to White settler attempts at reconciliation and solidarity with Indigenous peoples.

Relationality is central to Indigenous ontologies, and is in stark contrast to the individualistic, hierarchical, and dominating pillars of White supremacy (Saad, 2020; Unsettling Minnesota, 2010; Walia, 2012). Amadahy (2011) describes a “relationship framework” of solidarity where “we don’t see ourselves, our communities, or our species as inherently superior to any other, but rather see our roles and responsibilities to each other as inherent to enjoying our life experiences” (in Walia, 2012. n.p.).

**Intimate Solidarity.** In their article on living a decolonizing queer politic, Hunt and Holmes (2015), offer a beautiful analysis on how solidarity and change can happen not only in more visible front-line activist sites, but also in our intimate spaces and homes with our friends and loved ones. They ask us to move beyond the binary thinking of what solidarity is and isn’t, and place value on the “quiet, relational processes of change” (p.158). It is within these everyday “intimate acts of reciprocity that... relationships of allyship are formed” (Hunt & Holmes, 2015, p.163). Through sharing examples from their own relationship, they explain that “friendships can provide opportunities for enacting allyship and a decolonial queer praxis, while raising questions about reciprocity and accountability across axes of difference” (p.160). However, they also remind us that these intimate spaces can be “a medium through which dominant sociocultural ideas are

at once contested *and* reproduced” and are not inherently immune to the trappings of White supremacy (p.161).

Another important caveat Hunt and Holmes (2015) point out from Black feminist Bernice Johnson Reagan (1983) is to settle not *only* in these homey, loving places of solidarity, but to also “practice solidarity in uncomfortable places” (p. 158). This queering<sup>9</sup> of White hetero-patriarchal colonial relationships offers a more expansive view of interconnectedness and relationships and refuses the individualistic pillar of White supremacy, “re-orienting ourselves away from White supremacist logics and systems and toward more respectful and accountable ways of being in relation to one another and the lands we live on (Hunt & Holmes, 2015, p.168). Flowers (2015) also reminds us that settler solidarity must not be contingent on forgiveness from Indigenous peoples, or being “nice” or “friendly” to us.

### ***Amplification of voices***

Amplifying the voices of those we are attempting to be in solidarity with was another theme found in the literature on the qualities of allyship (Carlson et al., 2019; Goodman, 2001; hooks, 1986; Regan, 2010; Walia, 2012). This is a response to the fact that voices of the oppressors have dominated policies, discourse, academia, research, and systems since colonization began (hooks, 1986; Regan, 2010; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Walia, 2012). Amplifying the voices of Indigenous peoples or whoever we are attempting to be in solidarity with is connected to the idea of de-centering Whiteness, listening more than talking, and taking the lead from Indigenous leaders in settler solidarity (Carlson et

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<sup>9</sup> Queering refers to the process of interrogating the dominant belief (in this case White heteropatriarchal colonial relationships) and “to render it abnormal, to name it and make it visible in order to challenge it” (Riggs, 2010, in Hunt & Holmes, 2015, p.156).

al., 2019; Flowers, 2015; Kraemer, 2007; Walia, 2012). Although Whiteness is the primary focus of this research, it is important to center the experiences of marginalized people when attempting to address violence (Carlson et al., 2019; Flowers, 2015; Kraemer, 2007; Walia, 2012).

This quality of solidarity can be difficult to apply. For instance, hooks (1986) questions “who gets to speak for who?” in solidarity. For allies, the answer is complicated. How do we simultaneously speak less, amplify voices of the marginalized, and also speak up and disrupt racism, violence, or injustice (Carlson et al., 2019; Curnow & Helferty, 2018; Flowers, 2015; Walia, 2012)? Carlson et al (2019) acknowledge the nuanced skill of knowing when to speak and when to stay silent and listen. Walia (2012) names the complication of choosing *whom* to take direction from, “considering the diversity of political opinions” among marginalized peoples, who are not a monolith.

### ***Accountability***

Accountability is another key quality in solidarity and is essential in reducing the risk of perpetuating the harms and violence we are trying to contest and disrupt in our solidarity attempts (Carlson et al., 2019; Goodman, 2001; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Reynolds, 2012, 2013; Walia, 2012). Accountability involves how we stay ethical, how we test how useful our solidarity is, what the consequences are when we make a mistake, what our obligations are, and to whom do we answer (Carlson et al., 2019; De Lissovoy & Brown, 2013; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Reynolds, 2012, 2013; Saraceno, 2012; Walia, 2012). Hunt and Holmes (2015) remind us that “allyship requires *accountability* on the part of members of the dominant group and is not predicated on reciprocity by those who

are marginalized” (p.162). Reynolds (2010) delineates between collective and individual accountability of White settlers and reminds us that:

Collective accountability requires that I be responsible for more than my personal individual acts. This is in resistance to capitalism and individualism, which only require personal responsibility. For example, if my White brother enacts racism, I do not distance myself saying, “I’m not that White guy.” I lean in and help my White brother. This is my work to do as a White person. I sometimes refer to racism as the perfect crime, because I acknowledge that I do not have to enact racism in order to benefit from it (p. 24).

### ***Discomfort***

Disrupting our settler comfort is a necessary aspect of solidarity that was found in the literature (De Lissovoy & Brown, 2013; Flowers, 2015; Regan, 2010; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Not to get stuck in our own shame or guilt, but to move past the discomfort to become more useful in our efforts of solidarity (Vikki Reynolds, personal communication, February 8, 2020). In addition to disrupting settler comfort, the importance of being able to sit with this discomfort, to sit with the violence, to sit with the tension of the irreconcilable, are emphasized throughout the literature (Curnow & Helferty, 2018; De Lissovoy & Brown, 2013; Flowers, 2015; MacKenzie, 2019; Regan, 2010). McGuire and Denis (2019) name a specific example of discomfort for White settlers: *unsettling lessons on residential schools and other colonial realities* as a foundational aspect of why White settlers engage with reconciliation.

Flowers (2015) generously reminds us that as settlers, our solidarity cannot be contingent on being forgiven by Indigenous individuals or communities or people being

“nice” to us. She explains that “many Indigenous peoples are not willing to forgive settler violence, so how can we trust and move forward in co-resistance without first being able to relinquish our resentment? (p. 38). White settlers must remain committed to solidarity regardless of forgiveness or comfort: “As Eve Tuck (2012) insists, solidarity is an uneasy and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict” (MacKenzie, 2019, p. 98). This section detailed some key aspects, common pitfalls, and qualities of White settler solidarity. A review of the literature on Witnessing will follow.

### **Witnessing**

The following literature review provides a scholarly exploration of the concept of witnessing. I define witnessing as an embodied practice of listening, remembering, and being, with a necessary inclusion of action (Chadwick, 2019; Hunt, 2014; Reynolds, 2002, 2010). I was drawn to the justice-doing possibilities of witnessing and its ability to “build connections and allyship across oppressed groups and across difference” (Mack & Na’puti, 2019; in Reed, 2021, p. 26). Reynolds (2002, 2010a, 2020) credits activist traditions as being the roots of witnessing and points out that the presence of witnesses at social justice actions can act as resistance against human rights violations with intent to hold those in power accountable. It is important to acknowledge that witnessing is also a specific cultural practice in Indigenous communities, and to take care not to appropriate or claim these practices (S. Joseph, personal communication, November 8 2020; Hunt, 2014; Richardson, 2012). This includes the specific Kwagiulth methodology of witnessing based on the potlatch system outlined by Kwagiulth scholar Sarah Hunt (2014), and Richardson’s (2012) article on witnessing rituals in family therapy. My

research does not engage or take up these specific and sacred Indigenous cultural practices and more focuses on witnessing from the lens of White scholars such as Reynolds (2010a, 2010b), Ellis and Rawicki (2013), and Nagy (2020).

The realms of witnessing that have emerged from research include the philosophical and theoretical background of witnessing, witnessing as a response to genocide or wars in the form of truth commissions and survivor testimonies, witnessing in practical contexts such as therapy and research, witnessing and activism, and witnessing as a specific cultural practice (Clark, 2016a; Cruz, 2011; Ellis & Rawicki, 2013; Figueroa, 2020; Fine, 2006; Hunt, 2014; Lindroos & Möller, 2017; McCormack, 2014; Nagy, 2020; Oliver, 2015; Patel, 2020; Reynolds, 2002, 2010a; Richardson, 2012; Richardson & Reynolds, 2012). Several of these areas are beyond the scope of my research and the literature on witnessing that I will be focusing on this review includes witnessing in practical contexts such as therapy and research. My research is inspired by and draws on Vikki Reynolds (2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2013, 2019) work on pathways to justice-doing and the possibilities of White settler witnessing.

### **Witnessing as Framework for Practice**

Vikki Reynolds (2010a), who is foundational to the development of my own practice standards and ethics, developed an ethical framework for practice, naming three “witness’ positionings” and seven “witnessing principles” which are also applicable to my White settler solidarity. Although this article centers on her work with survivors of torture and political violence which is different than my research which discusses the possibilities of White settler witnessing within an emerging and solidarity practice, Reynolds notes there were several aspects of her framework that are suited to community

solidarity. Her work on witnessing and justice-doing largely informed my framing of witnessing and how I organized my data, which will be detailed in Chapter 4. The three “witness positionings” are: (1) witnesses address power, taking a position for justice in a social political world; (2) the witness has complex understandings of the political world and critical engagements with language; and (3) witnesses constantly examine their ethical positioning for work alongside survivors of torture and political violence (Reynolds, 2010a, p. 164-168). These three witness positionings offer a framework on how to be an ethical witness. The first two positionings are directly applicable to my research and work as White settler in YFD. While the third positioning specifies work alongside survivors of torture and political violence, which is a different context to my own work with Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in YFD, I engage with a stance of constantly examining my ethical positioning in my solidarity practice, research, and work. The seven witnessing principles are: (1) structuring safety; (2) cultural and collective accountability; (3) collaboration; (4) honouring resistance; (5) belonging, community, solidarity; (6) witness, not gossip; and (7) immeasurable outcomes (Reynolds 2010a). This is the only fully fleshed out therapeutic practical framework that I found in the literature on witnessing.

In earlier writing, Reynolds (2002) outlines “cultural witnessing groups” in her work at Peak House, a residential program in Vancouver for youth struggling with substance misuse and oppression. Reynolds describes cultural witnessing groups used with three different “cultural groups” (therapist, witness, and “client”): with a therapist interviewing one group, while the other group acts as witness and then offers reflections and conversations about the process afterwards. She offers that witnessing promotes

collaborations and a decentering of the practitioner as it gives the practitioners a “place to stand that does not position them as an outsider... and also gives people a place to stand together, to belong, and a position from which to continue celebrating and resisting” (p. 92).

Reynolds’ work on witnessing (2002, 2010a) articulated within her work on *justice-doing* (2010a, 2012, 2019). She states that she uses a “witnessing metaphor” to frame her ethical stance for justice-doing in her work (2010b, p. 14). She goes on to explain witnessing as “an experience of being held up collectively with others who share our ethical responsibilities” (2010b, p. 14). She presents six guiding intentions on an ethical stance for justice-doing: (a) centering ethics; (b) doing solidarity; (c) addressing power; (d) fostering collective sustainability; (e) critically engaging with language; (f) structuring safety (2010b).

I draw particular attention to an aspect of intention (e), critically engaging with language, which invites “linguaging the body, [and] acknowledging ways of being together that are outside of spoken language” (p.77). While my research does not investigate the more specific linguistic aspects that Reynolds (2010b) attends to, it does describe an embodied quality important in witnessing and justice-doing. Reynolds speaks to the concept of a “social poetic” (for which she credits Arlene Katz, John Shotter, and Tom Anderson), which “invites us to attend to the unsaid” (Reynolds, 2010b, p. 84). This embodied way of listening and remembering is a key aspect of witnessing found in the literature on witnessing from Kwagiulth scholar Sarah Hunt (2014).

Richardson and Reynolds (2012) engage their collective ethical orientation towards “staying alive in the work” in an article that speaks to some similar intentions for

justice-doing that Reynolds engaged with in previously mentioned articles (2010a, 2010b, 2019). They described the shared and unique aspects of their ethical orientation from the perspective of a White settler (Reynolds) and Métis and Cree person (Richardson). They list the following as aspects of their ethical orientation: responding with justice doing; a hopeful skepticism; contesting “burnout” and cynicism: bringing hope; honouring resistance; enacting solidarity; an ethic of belonging; the sacred; and amazingly alive. My research as White settler with outsider perspective investigates how witnessing can be my own path to justice-doing and a potential “place to stand” to critically examine myself, while in relationship with others. Next, the scholarship of witnessing in research will be outlined.

### **Witnessing in/as Research**

#### ***Collaborative Witnessing Approach***

In Ellis and Rawicki (2013), a collaborative witnessing approach to research is explored as “relational autoethnography that allows researchers to focus on and evocatively tell the lives of others in shared storytelling and conversation” (p. 366). Collaborative witnessing is also explored in Drummond (2018) research on deconstructing settler narratives of Indigenous artistic practice. Co-researchers and storytellers Ellis and Rawicki (2013) share Rawicki’s experiences as a Holocaust survivor; they draw from feminist and postmodern schools of thought where collaborative participation from all parties is fostered in research and from those who participate in activism in their research.

Ellis’ and Rawicki’s (2013) article includes a fulsome history of their relationship and connection, which is perhaps a nod towards the importance of genuine and reciprocal

relationships in witnessing. Hunt (2014) also maintains that the role of witness is dependent on the quality of reciprocal relationships. Using storytelling and conversation afterwards, Rawicki's pain, resistance, and strength is explored and witnessed by Ellis. Connecting to the key principle of accountability in witnessing, this research uses *friendship as method* which requires an acknowledgment and respect for the responsibilities of friendships to take care of the other and not exit the relationship when sufficient information has been obtained (Ellis & Rawicki, 2013).

Nagy (2020) speaks about witnessing as an experience that “involves a reaching beyond ourselves and responsiveness to the agency and self-determination of the other” (p. 221), which draws from philosopher Kelly Oliver's (2015, 2001) work on witnessing. Nagy specifies that this “responsiveness to the other” in a settler colonial context means “honouring ‘Aboriginal principles of witnessing’ as per the TRC's mandate, as well as the broader relational ethics of Indigenous storytelling, which center on principles of respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and reverence (Archibald, 2008)” (p. 220). Nagy argues that witnessing can function as a path to White settler accountability, but provides the caveat that this can only happen when settler witnessing “leads to the disruption of colonial narratives, a reckoning of complicity, and decolonizing change” (p. 220). This further drives home the need for action and a critical examination of self in White settler solidarity.

### ***Faithful Witnessing***

Cindy Cruz (2011) presents the idea of *faithful witnessing* for researchers who are committed to being in solidarity with the communities they are working with and offers an alternative to the othering or distancing that happens in mainstream social science

research. Cruz credits the term *faithful witnessing* to feminist philosopher Maria Lugones (2003). Cruz describes *faithful witnessing* as a practice that can highlight resistance and urges that researchers must be attuned to resistance and interpret behaviour as resistance. In recognizing resistance, we can also sense each other as possible allies in resistance (Cruz, 2011; Lugones, 2003).

This literature, in particular Reynolds (2010a, 2010b, 2019) ideas on witnessing within an ethical stance for justice-doing, alongside literature on solidarity, have shaped my own articulation of justice-doing and the possibilities of White settler witnessing which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I have first outlined how I show up in my attempts at solidarity by describing the theoretical lenses I draw from and my praxis framework: critical race theory, intersectional feminism, and anti-oppressive praxis. I then provided a review of the literature on White settler solidarity and witnessing. In the following chapter I will describe my methodology: critical autoethnography using arts-based methods.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

My research methodology has evolved throughout the critical reflection process of clarifying what and who it is that I am studying. Before landing on my final methodology of arts-based critical autoethnography, I began this research process with intentions to use critical participatory action research and arts-based methods to explore the relationship between witnessing, resistance, and art with the participants in YFD. When I shifted the focus of the research away from appropriating community experience and towards my own racial identity, roles and responsibilities as a White settler. This meant that my methodology necessarily changed to critical autoethnography to tell my own story. This is to take the position that the “issue” to be examined is within myself and White settler society and *not* within YFD/the community I work with. My decision to flip the research onto myself is a way to act with an ethic of refusal: “where refusal is not just a *no* but a starting place for other forms of qualitative research” (Chadwick, 2019, p. 51). The relationships I have with the community in Tets’élūgé, with myself, and my own attempts at solidarity are complex and muddled: therefore, I have employed arts-based methods alongside my critical autoethnography to attempt to describe the “unexplainable” aspects. I explore how art can act as “co-witness” in this journey. This envisioning draws from CYC research, which has made space for anti-oppressive methodologies and methods (de Finney et al., 2018; MacKenzie, 2019).

In this chapter I will first introduce critical autoethnography (CAE) and how it’s distinguished from autoethnography. I will then outline my methods of data collection within an arts-based critical autoethnography, followed by justifications on why this

methodology and approach are suited to my research, and end with some limitations and critiques.

### **Critical Autoethnography**

Critical autoethnography (CAE) uses the personal experiences of a researcher to explore a cultural phenomenon through a lens that pays attention to the intersections of power and oppression (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020a, 2020b; Ellis & Adams, 2014) CAE links the theoretical to action and centers the importance of a research lens that accounts for an intersectional analysis of power, privilege, and injustice in all aspects of research (Holman Jones, 2016). The “critical” in critical autoethnography has roots in Freire’s critical pedagogy and uses this critical framework to inform and interpret research (Freire, 1973; G. A. Tilley-Lubbs, 2018). This critical pedagogy has a sharp focus on power and oppression, and “examines social conditions, uncovers oppressive power arrangements, and fuses theory and action to challenge processes of domination” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020a, p. 8). Alexander (2014) defines this criticality as “an engagement of discernment of the deep meanings in any given situation with the potentials and possibilities of transformation” (p. 36).

Holman Jones and Pruyn (2017) offer three aims of CAE: “(1) to examine systems, institutions, and discourses that privilege some people and marginalize others; (2) to mobilize and develop the explanatory frameworks that critical theory provides us—by putting theory into action through storytelling; and (3) to build new knowledge about the social world in order to stimulate new practices” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020a, p. 6). Boylorn and Orb (2020a) emphasize the importance of “a commitment to improving cultural conditions through critique” (p. 6).

### ***History of Critical Autoethnography***

CAE, which emerged from autoethnography, is distinguished from its antecedent by its critical focus on power, oppression, and improving societal conditions (Alexander, 2014; Boylorn & Orbe, 2020a). Several authors in the literature also point to intersectionality as a distinguishing feature of CAE from autoethnography (Alexander, 2014; Boylorn & Orbe, 2020a, 2020b; G. A. Tilley-Lubbs, 2018). The intersectional power of researchers is acknowledged in CAE, and research is approached from a “raced, classed, gendered, and sexed positionality, identifying the distinctions between her lenses for viewing the world and those of others” (G. Tilley-Lubbs, 2016, p. 13). Boylorn and Orb (2020) differentiate CAE from autoethnography by the critical scholarship that informs it.

The roots of autoethnography are in qualitative inquiry, with the first references to autoethnography corresponding with the rise of identity politics in the 1970s and the increasing value of more personal research (Adams et al., 2014; Ellis & Adams, 2014; Tilley-Lubbs, 2018). In the 1980s, “researchers in sociology, anthropology, communication, performance, and women’s and gender studies began writing and advocating for personal narrative, subjectivity, and reflexivity, though they did not often use the term “autoethnography”” (Adams et al., 2014, p. 16). Since the 1990s, autoethnography has become a legitimate form of inquiry that emphasizes personal narratives (Adams et al., 2014). Although autoethnography emerged in the 1990s as a “reaction to social-scientific research and the dominance of White/Western voices within social inquiry”, it remains predominantly led by White researchers (Chawla & Atay, 2018, p. 4).

Adams and Ellis (2014) identify three reasons for the emergence of auto-ethnography: (1) new and changing ideas about and ideals for research, a recognition of the limits of scientific knowledge, and an emerging appreciation for personal narrative, story, the literary and the aesthetic, emotions, and the body; (2) a heightened concern about the ethics and politics of research practices and representations; and (3) the increased importance of social identities and identity politics. (p. 8).

In simple terms, autoethnography is cultural analysis through personal narrative (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020a). Autoethnography can be further described as a deeply personal approach to research that describes and analyzes personal experiences to understand cultural experience (Adams et al., 2022; Boylorn & Orbe, 2020b; Brigg & Bleiker, 2010; Chen, 2021; Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis & Adams, 2014). Autoethnography considers identity and personal experience as an important source of knowledge and insight into cultural experience (Adams et al., 2022; Brigg & Bleiker, 2010; Chen, 2021; Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis & Adams, 2014). Autoethnographic research often uses story, narrative, or “artistic and analytical demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experiences” as research (Chawla & Atay, 2018; Jones et al., 2013).

CAE “resists Grand Theorizing and the façade of objective research that decontextualizes subjects and searches for singular truth”, which fits with ABR, witnessing, and my own refusal of objectivity and neutrality (Spry, 2001, p. 710). I also appreciate how CAE can foster relationships between researcher/writer, reader, and those in community with the reader by engaging “the reader and the thoughts and conversations prompted by a good autoethnographic story” (Henrich, 2012, p. 28).

### ***Common CAE Methods***

CAE uses researchers' personal experiences as primary data, typically compared and contrasted with existing research (Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis & Adams, 2014). “Layered accounts” are created using tools such as “field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts, and then describing these patterns using facets of storytelling (e.g., character and plot development), showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice.” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 277). Data collection and analysis happens simultaneously and emerges from researcher reflexivity and introspection (Ellis et al., 2011; Tilley-Lubbs, 2016). Reflexivity, or the constant turning inwards by researchers, is a central component of CAE (Chawla & Atay, 2018; Tilley-Lubbs, 2016). Boylorn and Orb (2020) describe CAE’s ability to make room “for critical self-reflexivity and cultural commentary to examine embodied experiences, relational encounters, and intercultural conundrums” (p. 6).

Being familiar with existing research and comparing and contrasting one’s own social and personal location with the research are important aspects of CAE (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020b; Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis & Adams, 2014). My literature review in Chapter 2 provided an overview of what existing research had to say about solidarity and witnessing, and also functioned to provide some key witnessing intentions that I use to organize and report out on my findings.

### **Arts-based Research**

In my research I employ an arts-based CAE and thus will provide a brief history and description of Arts-Based Research (ABR) below. The term ABR was coined in 1993 by Elliot Eisner and has evolved to its current understanding as research that uses art “to

explore, understand, represent and even challenge human action and experience” (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2014, p.1 in Wang et al., 2017). ABR is located in constructionist and critical frameworks of knowledge production, in which “knowledge is understood to be local, contextual, and co-created within social interactions and power dynamics” (Hammond et al., 2018, p. 268). ABR is a kind of inquiry where artistic methods are used as a tool in one or more phases of research to explore an issue, evoke meaning making and analysis, as well as to communicate this knowledge and process to viewers/consumers of the research (Hammond et al., 2018; Khanna, 2011; Wang et al., 2017).

ABR can be organized into three categories: research about art, art *as* research, and art *in* research (Wang et al., 2017). This study will focus on the latter two: art as research – which entails exploring what art “can do or activate”, often has researchers creating art, and views the act of creating art as research itself (Wang et al., 2017) – and, art *in* research, – which involves when art is created by participants and researchers, and “the art component may be used to determine the focus of the research, formulate research questions, generate data, collect data, analyze data, represent the findings of the study, represent a response to the findings, evaluate the research, disseminate the research findings, and/or generate meaning and trigger responses from the audience” (Wang et al., 2017, p. 16).

Art offers a mechanism to witness, provoke and speak truth to power, and provides a venue for unmediated, unbridled, irreverent conversation with society, which aligns with the broader goals of the research to resist violence against Indigenous women, girls, trans, and two-spirit people (Hammond et al., 2018; Isaac & Decter, 2012; Khanna,

2011; Lindroos & Möller, 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Ward & Shortt, 2020; Wright, 2020). Wright (2020) contends that “art can provide tools, scaffolding and resources for youth to learn to become activists and create fundamentally new visions for their identities, realities and systems” (p. 36). In addition, ABR can provide a deeper, embodied, and complex understanding of an issue that Eurocentric text-based research cannot. The flexible and fluid format of critical autoethnography and ABR allows for these non-linear, embodied, and more creative stories to be told in a natural way. I have used arts-based reflections to inform my CAE, and also have drawn from my previous experience with the creation of the collaborative art piece by YFD participants and myself.

## **Data Collection Methods**

### ***Personal Narratives***

CAE focuses primarily on the experiences of the researcher; therefore, my emotions, reactions, reflections and memories are the primary sources of data (Adams et al., 2022). These are comprised of data on myself, which includes the use of personal narratives through journaling and arts-based reflections. In addition, I provided participants the option of sharing their stories with me as part of my White settler accountability framework, which I will also discuss.

The main source of primary data was collected in a non-linear process from reflexive journal entries that included reflections on the research questions of witnessing as a useful solidarity practice, and how art can be a co-witness. The use of layered personal narratives is common in CAE: “texts that assemble fragments of personal experience, memory, extant research, introspection, other sources of information alongside each other in creative and juxtaposed ways (Ellis, 1991 in Ellis & Adams,

2014, p. 22). CAE researchers are said to “work as bricoleurs who make textual mosaics of cultural experience (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, in Ellis & Adams, 2014). Ellis et al., (2011) define personal narratives as “stories about authors who view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative narratives specifically focused on their academic, research, and personal lives” (p. 279).

Through the use of personal narrative, I reflected on my experience as a White settler facilitating YFD and other solidarity attempts in my life. From September 2021 to June 2022 I collected data through 70 journal entries. This reflective process was non-linear, with data collection, analysis, and also reflections on the data collection happening simultaneously. To help organize my data and journal entries, I created a Google document called “reflections on research” and drew from the literature discussed in Chapter 2 to create themes. Early in my data collected the themes became seven witnessing intentions. When I made a journal entry that was clearly related to a witnessing intention, I put them directly under the appropriate heading. Other journal entries in the “research reflections” document were put in a “parking lot” to be analyzed at the end of the data collection process.

Oftentimes, reflections or insights come to me in flashes; these seem to appear almost out of nowhere, sometimes connected to my surroundings and sometimes not. Perhaps due to my neurodivergent brain functioning, these flashes often contain precious information that can lead to deeper reflections but are also frequently lost if not written down. To capture these flashes, I wrote in-the-moment journal entries on my phone. I wrote some of my journal entries after the monthly YFD sessions, using the “research

reflections” document or on my phone. At the end of the process, I had written 70 journal entries to form my findings in Chapter 4.

### *Art based reflections*

I used art in multiple ways and layers to help to tell the story of the research, to channel and capture some of the feelings and embodied reflections that arose along the way, and also as a way to make meaning. I created four arts-based reflections throughout this research process, which will be discussed in Chapter 4. After the final YFD sessions I created the first two pieces: one on the collective art piece that was made by YFD, and one on my experience facilitating YFD. These were made with the online program Canva, and I used a combination of layering photographs and digital drawing. I made the third art-based reflection in May 2022 after YFD was completed for the year, also using the online program Canva, and the same tools of layering photographs and digital drawing. In June 2022 I made the fourth art piece with watercolour pencils as a reflection on the research process as a whole.

### *Vignettes from YFD participants*

In CAE, the researcher and the subject are the same and the focus is on the researcher's perspective (Adams et al., 2014). Therefore, I am both the researcher and main participant of the study. However, as my research also includes some contributions from YFD participants, it is important to detail that process and relationships as well. The project this research is focused on is located within the existing program YFD in Watson Lake Secondary School that is made up of around 15 Indigenous and non-Indigenous students who have self-selected to be in the program, and typically 2-4 Kaska Elders (numbers fluctuate throughout the year).

**The Art Piece.** The collaborative art piece, which I reflected on for my personal narratives and arts-based reflections, was created by participants of YFD, including myself and my co-facilitator, Renée Claude Carrier. The idea for a collaborative art piece came out of wanting to create a follow up art piece to the red dress we made in 2019. As a group, we decided to create a blanket to go with the red dress to honour the thousands of MMIWGT2S+ across Canada and the 42+ MMIWGT2S+ in the Yukon. Some participants beaded contributions, while others painted, or did embroidery. Some youth beaded projects together, with family members, or with the Elders in the group. A red hide was purchased as the material for the blanket. During the final April and May sessions, the group, including myself, sewed the contributions onto the red hide and unveiled it for the community on May 5th, the National Day of Awareness for MMIWGT2S+.

**The process.** In January 2022 I first informed YFD that I was doing research that was going to be based on my work there. In the April and May YFD sessions I explained more specifically what my thesis was about and the opportunity to contribute to it. The youth and Elders were informed of expectations, and what the research would look like, how data would be collected, a review process of the final research study, and what would happen with the research results (Appendix A). This information was communicated in conversations and through the consent forms. They were informed that if they chose to participate, they would be given \$50 to honour their time and contribution.

**Consent.** Consent forms outlined information about the research, and that they were able to withdraw their participation and consent at any time. I gave YFD

participants consent forms for them or their parents to sign, and also had one on one conversations with some who had more questions, or who had missed the group explanation. I let them know that they could choose to include their name, choose to be anonymous, or use a pseudonym.

The returning YFD student participants were familiar with the process of signing consent forms and receiving information about research as there is other research being conducted with the group. In addition, consent is a big piece of YFD's curriculum, and the group learns about confidentiality in the first session. All participants co-create group agreements and sign their names to this informal contract, which can help create safety in the group. This potentially helped with the mitigation of risks with consent and confidentiality. Because most of the relationships between participants of YFD and researcher were pre-existing, participants seemed comfortable sharing their needs and boundaries around informed consent and confidentiality.

**The Vignettes.** Participants of YFD were invited to contribute to my research by sharing a short statement or story about (a) the contribution to the collaborative art piece; and/or (b) What resistance looks like to you; and/or (c) A witness statement you would like to share with MMIWGT2S+. These prompts were shared on the consent form. I also invited the interested participants to share anything else they wanted to.

To account for different styles of communication, I explained that they could share their contribution verbally, which would be recorded on my phone and then transcribed, or they could submit something in writing. Five participants (three Elders, two youth) decided to contribute. Some possible reasons for this are shared below in limitations. The youth submitted written contributions, one via text message and one via

a handwritten statement. The Elders all chose to share verbally, which I recorded on my phone. After I transcribed the verbal contributions, I checked to see if the Elders wanted to make any changes to their contribution. These contributions speak for themselves and are not meant to be analyzed by me but to encourage accountability in White settler solidarity and the amplification of the voices of the YFD participants. Furthermore, the experiences of the Indigenous participants are in stark contrast to my reality as White settler.

### **Why this Methodology and approach fits with my research**

CAE, arts-based methods, and witnessing have many interlocking and overlapping principles that fit well with this research and my own positionality as researcher. This was especially fitting for conducting research as a neurodivergent person, because it makes space for uniqueness of interpretation, creativity, and recognition of diverse ways of learning. Following the lead from CYC research, this arts-based CAE can disrupt more rigid Eurocentric research, validate alternative, embodied ways of knowing that are often ignored in academia, and incorporate a focus on action, change, and embodied and emotional knowledge (Ayala & Zaal, 2016; Chadwick, 2019; Hammond et al., 2018; Nguyen, 2019; Oliveira, 2019; Spry, 2001; Wang et al., 2017; Ward & Shortt, 2020; Wright, 2020).

Using arts-based CAE is flexible enough to house my intentions of resisting and disrupting Eurocentric research ideas that uphold White supremacy and colonialism. In particular, reflecting on and writing my own story using an arts-based CAE and organizing data within my emerging witnessing intentions could “incite alternative ways to listen, hear, and seek innovative forms of expression, not necessarily through speech or

narratives” (McCormack, 2014, in Chadwick 2019, p. 33). Art has also been shown to be a political witness and as a way to respond to injustice (Lindroos & Möller, 2017).

### **Limitations and Critiques**

Although my existing relationship as YFD facilitator offered many benefits to building relationships as researcher, the dual role was also a limitation. The data collection from participants (vignettes) happened during the final two sessions, which are typically the busiest sessions as we usually plan an end-of-year community event and also had the collaborative art piece to finish. Therefore, there was not ample time or flexibility in the day to meet with YFD participants to collect their stories, as I was busy fulfilling my role as facilitator alongside my role as researcher. In hindsight, it would have been better if I had planned an extra day outside of YFD to meet with the participants. Further, the central purpose of this research is for White settler reflection on solidarity and therefore, YFD participants may not have seen themselves in this research.

### ***Critiques on Methodology and Approaches***

Critical Autoethnography and ABR are not innocent methodologies and can still reproduce harmful and colonial research dynamics (Hammond et al., 2018; Khanna, 2011). As Khanna (2011) points out, there is an “assumption that the relational nature of arts-based methods is inherently empowering and facilitates feminist social change” without a close examination of its own limitations (p. 46). Although I hoped to avoid this by keeping the focus on myself by using CAE as methodology, I ask myself: is there always the risk of essentializing and romanticizing marginalized people and co-opting or appropriating their perspectives and ideas (Fairey, 2018; Khanna, 2011)? I am reminded that when using critical methodologies such as CAE, it is important to keep

methodologies alive, dynamic, flexible and responsive to the many intersectional points of oppression (Khanna, 2011; Reynolds, 2012).

Another way to resist the “benevolent imperialism” that can exist in these methodologies and can be enacted by researchers such as myself is to aim for a strong ethical and reciprocal relationship (Khanna, 2011; Tilley, 2016). The way I address this and hold myself accountable is through the seven witnessing intentions in my Emerging Solidarity Practice I developed as my own pathway to justice-doing (described in Chapter 4), which centers the importance of respectful, reciprocal relationships.

### ***Validity and Generalizability***

Issues with validity and lack of generalizability and scientific rigor have been brought up about CAE due to the contextual nature of the research and that results are not replicable across populations (Nguyen, 2019). However, generalizability was not the goal of this research. To enhance accuracy and attempt triangulation, participants were given an opportunity to review the data and the research to check for accuracy (O’Connor & Gibson, 2003). This step allows for participants to ensure that their stories are being represented accurately, “Moreover, member checking is a way within critical research to attempt respectful representation, some form of validity, and to communicate that what is being shared is being understood by the researcher” (O’Connor & Gibson, 2003; Reed, 2021, p. 54; Tilley, 2016).

The personal nature of autoethnography can make it more difficult to share with the public as critiques of work can translate into critiques of self (Nguyen, 2019). I would argue that an openness to personal critique and being aware of White fragility is an

important part of solidarity work and remaining ethical, accountable, and ultimately, useful (Reynolds, 2020).

Despite using a highly critical lens and methods, limitations and ethical considerations abound in this kind of research. As I continued, some clear tensions emerged, such as the question of *who* gets to decide what is useful in the creation of a solidarity framework for White settlers. This tension needs to acknowledge that no matter how much I refuse or divest from White supremacy in my practice and research, because I am White, I belong to the dominant group that holds “the most legitimate way to view the world” (Strega, 2015, p. 201, in Mackenzie, 2019, p. 52). These tensions will be fleshed out in Chapter 4. By attempting arts-based CAE that envisions futuristic ideas of research, settler identity, and solidarity, and by refusing the objective singular truth of Eurocentric ideology, I aim to sit in a liminal space of questioning what is possible (Brown & Strega, 2015).

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I introduced my chosen methodology: arts-based Critical Autoethnography. I have first described CAE, provided a history and how it is distinct from autoethnography, followed by a description of ABR. I then outlined the data methods I have employed, namely, the use of personal narrative journal reflections and arts-based reflections to tell this story. I then described the collaborative art piece the YFD created, and how the vignettes from participants were collected. Next I provided justification on why an arts-based CAE and organizing data within my emerging witnessing intentions fits with my research. The chapter ended with a section on limitations and critiques. In the following chapter I will discuss the main themes and

reflections that emerged from this process within an emerging White settler solidarity practice.

## Chapter 4: Discussion

In this chapter I articulate my own path to justice-doing through seven witnessing intentions that make up my White Settler Emerging Solidarity Practice for Justice-Doing. This chapter centers on meaning-making from an examination of my experiences as a White Settler engaged with solidarity and as co-facilitator of Youth for Dignity (YFD). Organized around my emerging seven witnessing intentions for justice-doing, this chapter includes a discussion of findings that revealed themselves and contains a blend of written and arts-based reflections to attempt to capture the meaning behind my data. My racial as White settler identity was clearly a central lens.

I will begin with an outline of my approaches to data analysis, followed by a discussion of my emerging solidarity practice which is shaped by seven witnessing intentions for justice-doing that have come out of the literature and my data: (a) an examination of self as witness; (b) reciprocal and respectful relationships; (c) intersectionality; (d) embodied listening and remembering; (e) honouring resistance; (f) action; and (g) accountability.

### Approach to Analysis

When making meaning from the data, I reflected on my research question: *In what ways can witnessing function as a useful practice framework for White Settler solidarity? Secondly, how can art act as witness or co-conspirator?* I approached data analysis in a fluid, non-linear way and alongside data generation and collection. This is supported by literature on Critical Autoethnography (CAE), which allows for the research process to move back and forth between data collection, analysis, and meaning making (Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis & Adams, 2014). This process did not follow clear steps, and

“encompassed uncertainty and mystery and dissuaded reliability and predictability (McNiff, 1998, in Chadwick, 2019, p. 33). Using a flexible, arts-based CAE methodology made space for the intangible aspects of this work to surface that may be obscured by more standardized forms of research (Springgay & Irwin, 2005, in Chadwick, 2019, p. 36). Furthermore, I took a tentative, not-knowing stance in my approach to analysis and meaning making that does not seek a single, universal, or lasting truth (Reynolds 2010).

### *Analysis of Self Reflection data*

I created a total of 70 journal entries during the data collection process. Some were written on my phone, while others were written in my “reflections on research” document on my computer, that included themes from the literature which became preliminarily organized journal entries under my proposed seven witnessing intentions. I also created a “parking lot” for journal entries that had not yet been organized under the seven witnessing intention headings. The journal entries on my phone were not organized under any themes or headings.

Once I had finished the data collection process, I compiled all 70 journal entries into one document, and read through them to see how and if they related to each of the seven witnessing intentions. I labeled each journal entry with any of the seven intentions that they were related to using headings with separate colours. I then organized the document into the seven intentions. There were journal entries that related to multiple witnessing intentions, which is consistent with how Reynolds’ (2010b) frames her six intentions for justice-doing as having “fluid boundaries that are not mutually exclusive” (p.21). Four journal entries did not relate to these seven witnessing intentions.

Although defining the parameters and framing of witnessing early in the research process was helpful and important in containing and organizing my data and answering my research question as it relates to the usefulness of witnessing for White settler solidarity, it also presents a limitation to my research. I may have ended up with different data or results if I had not been specifically looking for these seven witnessing intentions. This presents an opportunity for further research.

### *Analyzing Art*

Ayala and Zaal (2016) describe analyzing art as: “analyzing that which has no words”. I created my own art for several reasons: to attend to the second research question, *how art can act as co-witness*; with intent to witness the data in an embodied way (Chadwick, 2019); and to reflect on my journal entries and the collective art piece as a White settler. I created four art pieces: one on the research process, one on the shift in research from PAR to CAE, one on my experience facilitating YFD, and one on the collective art piece that was created. I chose to use art to describe the indescribable, or unspeakable parts to this work that go beyond common Eurocentric and White biased understandings. Again, this ever-shifting, non-contained methodology of analysis reaches towards a both/and ethic, and refuses the static, fixed, and linear pillars of White supremacy (Hunt & Holmes, 2015). I hope that both the collaborative art piece and the art reflections serve multiple purposes: as a way to make meaning from the data, but also that the “art is created for and engaged with not just for arts’ sake, not in an abstract pursuit of beauty, but with an activist purpose to challenge, to mock, to shine a light where it has not shined before” (Ward & Shortt, 2020, p. 10). Settler colonialism works

actively to erase and naturalize its own violence against Indigenous peoples and to obscure resistance from the communities it harms.

The art reflections helped me to think about the research process, themes, and ideas in a way that got me out of my head and into my body and feeling the emotional process of exposing and examining my reality as a White Settler. Making the art was an intuitive process that relied on my feelings and sensations to reflect and make meaning as accompaniment to the more intellectual reflections I made in the journal entries.

### **My Framing of Witnessing**

Before I could attempt to answer my research questions: *in what ways can witnessing function as a useful practice framework for White settler solidarity?* *Secondarily, How can art act as co-witness?*, I first needed to define the parameters around the concept of witnessing. This was important as there are many uses, understandings, and applications of witnessing across the literature and I needed to contain my framing and understanding of witnessing in a way that made sense for me, my research, and exploring my own path to justice-doing (Reynolds, 2010b, 2012).

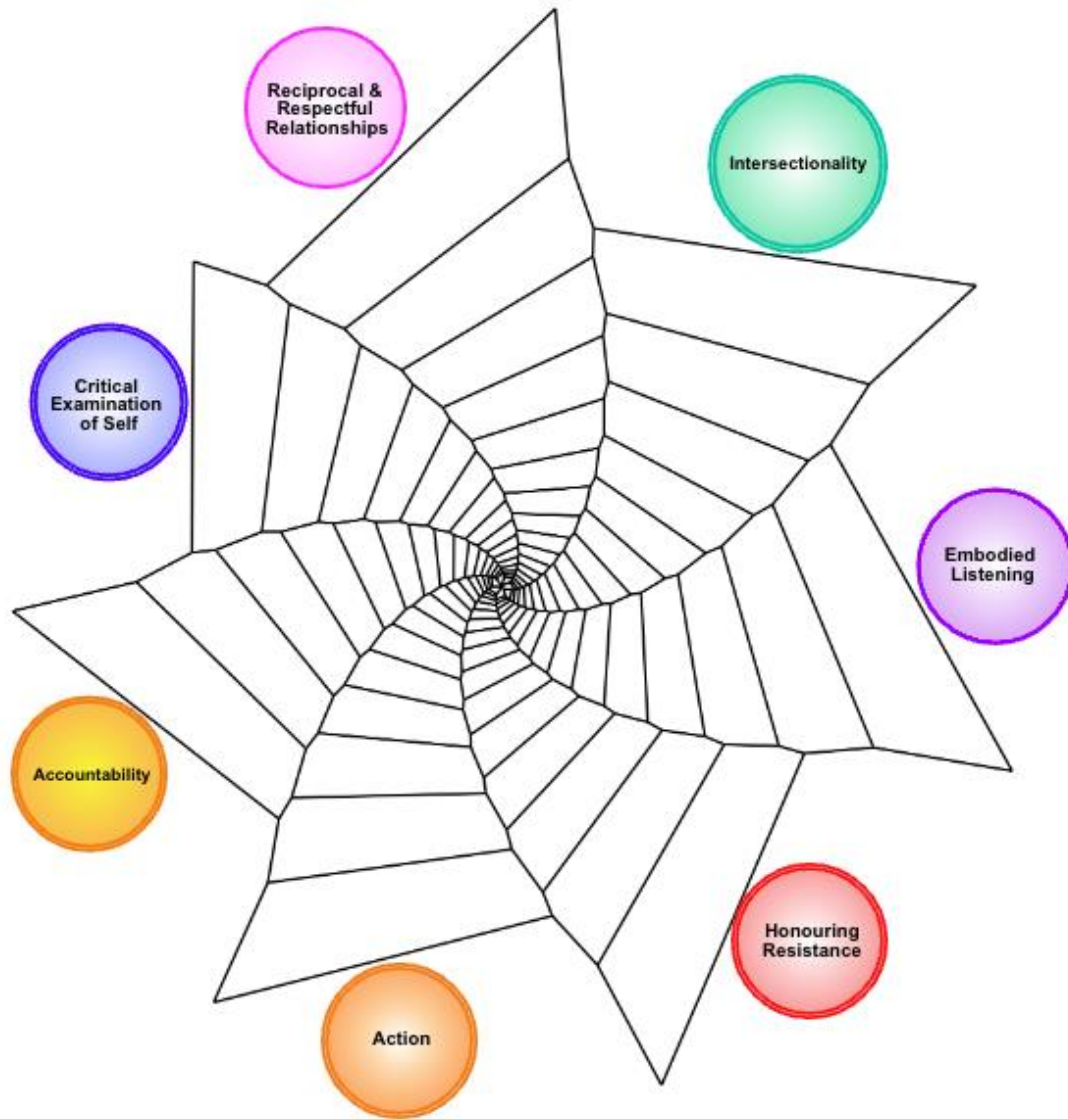
Reynolds (2010b) highlights that we all need to find our own way into our ethical stances for justice-doing and this research is my exploration into my own path of justice-doing through these seven intentions. My research builds on the work of other White settler CYC scholars such as Mackenzie (2019), who articulates her own “Ethical Pathway Towards Unsettling White Settler Practitioners” in her thesis. I used these seven intentions to organize my data in a tentative manner, to see how they would fit, or not fit, as pieces of a *useful* practice framework for my White settler solidarity. These seven

intentions of witnessing make up my White Settler Emerging Solidarity Practice for Justice-Doing, introduced below.

### **A White Settler Emerging Solidarity Practice for Justice-Doing**

I use the language of “intentions” instead of principles to describe that these aspects of my solidarity framework have fluid boundaries and are not mutually exclusive nor meant to be a prescribed set of tools(Reynolds, 2010b) . These are meant to be tentative, imperfect, and flexible gateways to White settler solidarity and justice-doing, and one possible way to address the complexities that come alongside this work (Reynolds, 2010b, 2013). The parameters I set on witnessing are not meant to claim a new theory on witnessing, or to foreclose future understandings, but as an opening and invitation for further exploration by myself and other White settlers engaged with justice-doing. Below is a visual representation of my emerging solidarity framework (Figure 6). I use spiral and fractal imagery to represent the interconnectedness and the fluid boundaries between these intentions, similar to the rhizomatic nature of Reynold’s (2010b) work. My discussion of findings, organized through the seven witnessing intentions that make up this emerging solidarity, will follow.

**Figure 6: A White Settler Emerging Solidarity Practice for Justice-Doing**



### **Witnessing Intention: Critical Examination of Self**

Although there is not meant to be a sequential order in the witnessing intentions, I use the critical understanding of self as White settler as a starting point due to its centrality to my research. A critical examination of self is a core aspect of CYC practice (Loiselle et al., 2012; White, 2007), solidarity (Bishop, 2002; Katz, 1978; Kivel, 2002; Regan, 2010; Reynolds, 2013; Saad, 2020), and is also found in the literature on

witnessing (Clark, 2016a; Reynolds, 2010b; Richardson, 2012). One of the most prominent themes in my research was “a critical examination of self” because of the personal focus in a critical autoethnography and being a White Settler researcher working in relationship within an Indigenous project created to examine and resist racism in the MMIWGT2S+ context. This theme appeared in 22 of the journal entries that I wrote and necessarily focuses on a personal exploration into my identity as White settler and less about my experience facilitating YFD, which is referenced more in the other witnessing intentions.

This section will first explore the inward shift I made in my research process from Participatory Action Research (PAR) to Critical Autoethnography (CAE), and then describe the tension of centering Whiteness. Reflections on this inward shift appeared in four of my journal entries, and I also created an accompanying arts-based reflection which will be described below.

As described in my methodology chapter, a major shift happened in my research when I decided to move the focus away from participants in Youth for Dignity (YFD) and instead inwards towards an examination of myself. Altering my research question and changing my methodology to critical autoethnography allowed me to explore this inward shift in a deep way: to fully examine who I am and what my presence means. This focus on self and Whiteness follows the lead from other White settlers engaged with critically examining their own Whiteness (Brechtbill, 2020; DiAngelo, 2018; Harding, 2018; Hurwitz, 2017; MacKenzie, 2019; McGuire & Denis, 2019). The decision to make this shift was informed by discussions with my committee and guided by embodied

sensations. This inclusion of embodied sensations is an example of the fluidity between these witnessing intentions and how they interact with each other (Reynolds, 2010b).

I describe this visceral embodied sensation in an early personal narrative: *I could not get rid of the icky and sinking feeling...that something was not right [January 13th, 2022]*. The weight in my shoulders, the tightness in my chest and jaw, all were sensations that helped guide me to recognize the feeling that I was complicit and always will be complicit in reproducing harmful or extractive research *on* Indigenous people despite my relationships with YFD and the community of Watson Lake. I realized that despite my best intentions, I risked missing an opportunity to practice what I had been learning about making Whiteness and White supremacy the target instead of Indigenous peoples.

This shift relates to White settler solidarity as it allowed me to move closer towards my desired anticolonial ethic of positioning myself/Whiteness/White supremacy as the “problem” to investigate, or “rage” against, instead of blaming communities most harmed by White supremacy (de Finney et al., 2018). The importance of naming oppressive systems to change them is made clear by CYC scholars (de Finney et al., 2018; Harding, 2018; MacKenzie, 2019). I also see it as my attempt to address the call for labour from White settlers on unpacking and dismantling our own issues (Regan, 2010; Reynolds, 2020; Saad, 2020). Layla F. Saad states that “at this time in history, more than ever before, people are asking what they can do to help dismantle White supremacy and where to begin...Begin within. Begin with you and White supremacy” (Saad, 2020, p. iii).

By keeping the focus of my research on my own Whiteness and White supremacy instead of on “helping” systematically violated and marginalized peoples, it also rejects

White saviourism, a common pitfall of White settler solidarity discussed in the literature review (Freire, 1970; Kraemer, 2007; Louis et al., 2019; Regan, 2010; Straubhaar, 2015). I can trace my own White saviour tendencies back to my childhood interests and desires to “help people” or to “change the world”. Unlearning and examining my own White saviourism will be a lifelong struggle and has been an important shift in the past 10 years or so. Instrumental in this shift was hearing the quote by Australian Indigenous activist Lilla Watson: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come here because your liberation is bound up with mine, let us work together” (in Kumsa, 2007, p. 103). It is something that I am constantly questioning with my actions, how I show up in community organizing and activism, and how I have conducted this research. Shifting from “helping” to committing to continually learn how to be in collective solidarity feels like a step in the right direction. I humbly recognize that I will forever filter the world through Whiteness and any of my attempts to be ‘in solidarity’ will necessarily be judged by Indigenous, Black, and racialized people. This means that I will continue to seek ongoing relationships in collaboration, consultation, and guidance as part of my White settler development as an anti-racist advocate.

By clearly naming and focusing on White supremacy as the perpetrator of oppression and violence, it resists the pathologizing and victim-blaming of racialized communities that have been harmed (Barber & Benson, 2020; Clark, 2016b; de Finney et al., 2018; Reynolds, 2020). I repeated this inward shift for my reflections throughout the research process: *when I found myself looking out, I decided to reflect back in [February 5th, 2022]*. However, intentional centering of Whiteness and self is not without tension.

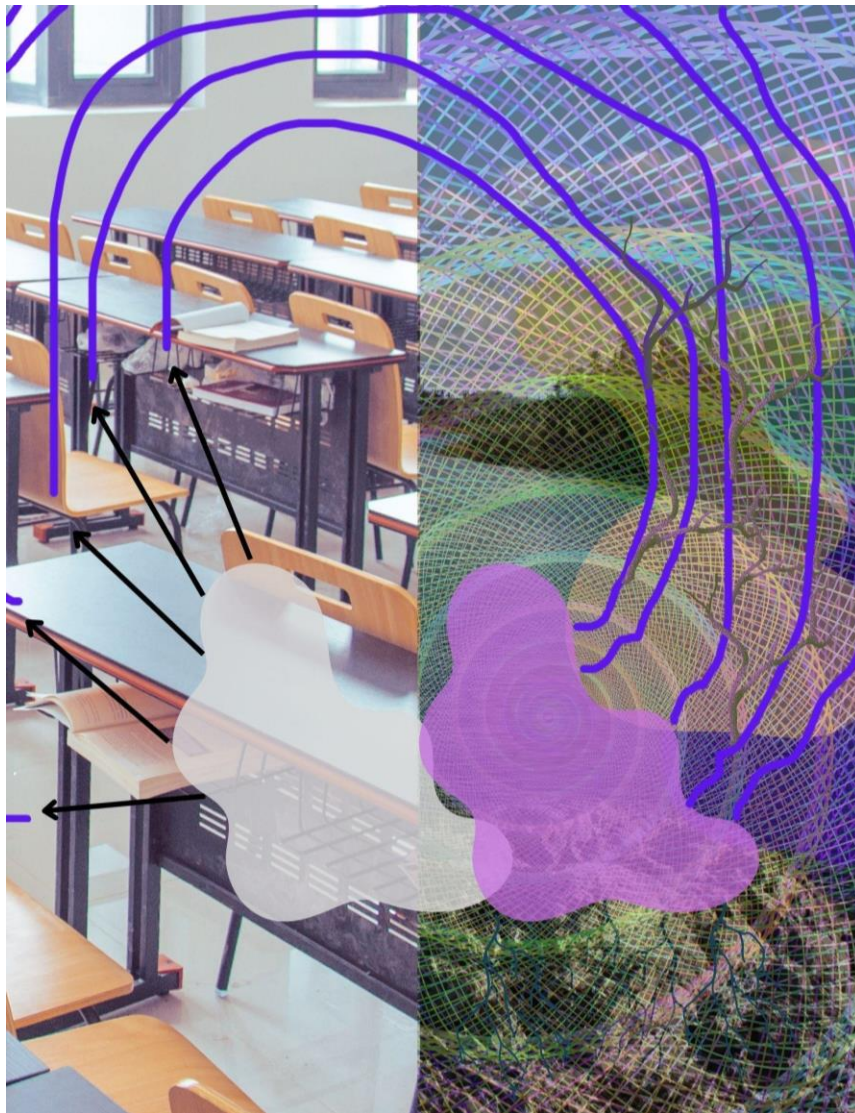
After reviewing my journal entries, the tension appeared in five journal entries. I questioned: *should I be spending this energy elsewhere in my solidarity efforts? Is there a better, more useful place for me to be?* [March 23, 2022]. Centering Whiteness seemed to conflict with the concept of amplifying the silenced or oppressed voices that was found in the literature review on White settler solidarity. I am not alone in grappling with this tension: as CYC scholar Kaz Mackenzie (2019) notes, I “wrestled with both the profound irony that interrogating whiteness also recenters it and with it, my own voice as a white settler CYC practitioner” (p. 6). However, she also states that it is impossible to challenge White supremacy without “engaging it head on” (p.6). An example of discomfort in centering myself and Whiteness in my research occurred when explaining my research to the YFD group. I was confronted with feelings of guilt around taking up too much space in the room as a White person and noticed myself rushing through explanations. Reflecting on this further, I also think it was a unique opportunity to acknowledge my research as a potential act of White settler solidarity, and to invite new understandings of solidarity for the non-Indigenous participants in the room. One White participant in particular expressed interest in reading my completed thesis.

In sitting with this tension, the drive to do no harm is a powerful force that constantly keeps me on my toes. I feel scared and worried that I am going to hurt someone, let them down, or say something wrong. My personal healing journey has taught me a parallel lesson for my solidarity journey: that if I cause harm, the goal is not to prove to the other person that I am indeed “good”, but instead to engage in repair work with the other person if they are willing, and to process my own feelings of guilt, or shame on my own or with my support system. This is based on a personal wound of

believing I am unworthy of love if I am not a “good” person. This wound reinforces a false binary between good/bad that I am trying to get away from in my research. Flowers (2015) is clear about settlers not requiring forgiveness or niceties from Indigenous people while attempting solidarity. I do not know if there is a clear answer to address this tension: instead, I lean into the idea that there is room for both a deep, critical examination of self, alongside the amplification of intentionally silenced voices in my solidarity attempts. To not make this centering of Whiteness the entirety of my solidarity efforts, but an inward piece of it.

I have faced tension several times in my solidarity practice and chosen not to engage or “do something” for fear of saying or doing the wrong thing. This is a dangerous place to be: that is why this thesis has become a way to explore some of these tensions; art has been one way of exploring and sitting with them. I will now describe the arts-based reflection (Figure 7) that I created about this inward shift and the embodied sensations attached.

**Figure 7: Art Reflection on the Shift**



*Art About the Shift*

I created this digital image to capture this inward shift in research. I used the online program Canva and a combination of layering images with digital drawing. The left-hand side of the image represents my original topic and methodology of looking outward towards others and the world, in a more Eurocentric, rigid setting. I used hand drawn lines to represent the inward shift, and the messiness of the methodology.

Although I had thought, written, and talked about my journey in unpacking my White settler identity in previous university papers and assignments, this research and art reflections were some of the first intentional practices of reflecting inward in an embodied way instead of using purely intellectual methods. This intentional inward focus allowed me to explore areas where I have not been socialized to look. I used roots and natural imagery in the background to represent how much more grounded and connected to the research I felt after the shift. The rhizomatic nature (Reynolds, 2010b) of both my brain and research process are represented by branch-like tendrils that connect all pieces of this work to each other and to me. This is in stark contrast to the individualistic worldview and socialization that I was born into. Some personal examples of this individualism from my upbringing were a lack of connection to extended family, and the emphasis on doing things independently from my parents. The choice to include rows of desks represents the individualistic nature of the majority of my educational journey, which had a strong focus on the success of the individual and competition in contrast to the collective.

This shift relates to looking inward as a reminder to be aware of where I am concentrating my efforts of solidarity. If I want to be useful, it helps to know where I should focus: this research process has reinforced the idea that I must focus on divesting from White supremacy, and how to continually disrupt White supremacy and settler colonialism. Next, the witnessing principle of reciprocal and respectful relationships will be discussed.

### **Witnessing Intention: Reciprocal and Respectful Relationships**

This witnessing intention is a foundational principle of CYC (White, 2007), and comes from literature on solidarity (hooks, 1986; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Katz, 1978; Louis et al., 2019; Selvanathan et al., 2020). It draws from two of Reynolds' (2010b) guiding intentions for an ethical stance for justice-doing: *fostering collective sustainability* and *structuring safety*. Other places where the importance of respectful relationships showed up in the literature on witnessing and justice doing include Richardson and Reynolds (2012) ideas on collective ethics and their orientation to “belonging”, Ellis and Rawicki's (2014) collective witnessing approach in research, the importance Hunt (2014) places on reciprocal relationships in the role of witness. McGuire and Denis (2019) highlight “Meaningful intergroup contact, or engagement across difference” as one of six pathways of *why* White settlers engage with reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

The witnessing intention of relationships came up in 12 journal entries. The main focus that emerged was how relationships can be places of possibility in three ways: places for attempting more authentic and useful solidarity, places to envision new relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, and places to resist White supremacy. I will first discuss the three above-mentioned ways that relationships can be places of possibility, followed by an arts-based reflection on my relationship with YFD.

#### ***Relationships as Places for Attempting more Authentic and Useful Solidarity***

Relationships can be powerful sites of change and possibility not only in a personal sense, but also in relationships of solidarity and social change (Hunt & Holmes, 2015). In one journal entry I wonder about the centrality of relationships: *does everything*

*come back to relationships? I suspect it does [January 26, 2022].* Reynolds (2010) reminds us that “a witnessing stance aims to open our work in hope-filled and just directions and configures therapeutic relationships as sites of belonging that can promote connections of solidarity” (p. 163). Solidarity work requires a lot of learning and unlearning, and in one of my journal entries, I acknowledge that a lot of what I have learned and unlearned is credited to the close friendships and relationships I’ve held with Indigenous people (McGuire & Denis, 2019; Regan, 2010). Colonialism and White supremacy have conditioned us/society to dehumanize Indigenous people through genocidal policies that create the narrative that Indigenous people are less-than human (Clark, 2016b; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wright Cardinal, 2017). These close relationships provide opportunities for humanization of Indigenous people in intimate spaces. I also reflected on the importance of reciprocity and care within my friendships to not enter into an extractive relationship, nor a dyad of “learner and teacher” (Hunt & Holmes, 2015).

The literature on solidarity explains that if someone *cares* about another person, it will increase their desire and ability to fight for them and be in solidarity with them (Louis et al., 2019; Walia, 2012). The topic of care showed up in four journal entries. I care deeply for the community of Watson Lake, LAWS, and the participants of YFD. I have been building relationships with the LAWS staff, Elders, youth, my co-facilitator, and the community of Watson Lake since 2015. The material my co-facilitator and I developed for YFD, which has always had a sharp critique of Whiteness and naming perpetrators of violence through use of Response-Based Practice, supported the development of my White settler solidarity, and ultimately, the shift from looking outwards at others inward to my own Whiteness. Through these years of building

relationships, these connections have made me care more about solidarity, and care more about my work as facilitator for YFD.

That being said, I know there is a real risk for me of White saviourism and paternalism being disguised as care without a critical anti-racist examination of White supremacy and power. Furthermore, the genocidal policies of residential schools, the 60s scoop, and the current child welfare system are all legitimized under the guise of “care” and “best interests of the child”.

When considering this risk of white saviourism and paternalism, I often reflect on the question *what is my business here?* [November 14th, 2021], which was a lesson taught to me by an Indigenous friend in 2017, and is similar to what Clark (2009) asks: “who are you and why do you care?”. This is a tension I hold within my work with LAWS: being invited by Ann Maje Raider (executive director of LAWS) to do this facilitation work and now connected and accountable to the community, balanced with the fact that I am a White settler outsider, and there ideally should be a Kaska person facilitating YFD.

My accountability as a White settler is now bound by these relationships. For example, my connection to and solidarity with MMIWGT2S+ is connected to all the people I know and love in Watson Lake who have had their family members murdered or disappeared, and to my Indigenous friends. These issues have become personal because of the relationships I have, my responsibilities as a White settler, and I am not fighting for some distant problem. I understand that my solidarity efforts are not *just* driven by my personal relationships or because I know people who live the reality of racism every day. The point is changing oppressive systems for *everyone*, without conditions, not just the people I am in relationship with. In one journal entry I remark on how I have people to

answer to in my solidarity efforts and *how it feels like I can't just walk away [December 3, 2021]*. An important reminder is that despite these intense feelings of responsibility and accountability and that I *can't* walk away, my White privilege allows me to shed this work in a way that my Indigenous and racialized friends cannot. It is important to acknowledge that I don't live with the fear of losing family members or of being disappeared myself. I also don't live in the community of Watson Lake and return home in between sessions. This means that I not only miss the lived experience and realities of community members, but I also miss the “ongoing hustle and bustle of life in this community”, a key part in an intimate relationship with community (Hunt & Holmes, 2015, p. 163).

***Relationships as Places to Envision New Relationships Between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples***

As Hunt and Holmes (2015) point out, relationships can be places to envision new ways of being between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people. Love is something that came up in five of my journal entries, and is one way that makes space for a different White settler-Indigenous relationship not bound by the confines of settler colonialism and White supremacy (Allooloo, 2014; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Laura, 2013). In one journal entry I ask *how does love change my practice, my relationships, my solidarity? [May 19th, 2022]*

In a journal entry, I reflect on the love between me and the Elders from YFD. The first time an Elder said “I love you” to me was over the phone. I remember how easy it was to say it back, and the warmth, relief, and space it opened up inside me afterwards. I remember one of my first embodied reactions was that it must have been a mistake, and

that she must have said it by accident. However, that anxious feeling passed, and now saying I love you seems like the most natural and right thing in the world.

Reflecting further on the roots of this anxiety, I see links to my own journey with White indicators of “professionalism” and the clear borders that have been drawn around care and affection with “those we work with”. Critically examining and unlearning rules around love, care, and affection, balanced with maintaining safety and consent, has been a freeing journey. As demonstrated by the anxiety I felt after the Elder said “I love you,” I still get snagged when I am confronted with something that goes outside of the White and Eurocentric training that I have mostly received. Since then, expressing my love towards others in YFD has become easier and opened doors for more vulnerability and friendship within these relationships, while recognizing that I will always be an outsider. This has looked like going for walks, talking on the phone about non-work subjects, visiting and drinking tea together. It is important to remember that although my relationships with Indigenous people can be full of love, care, and possibility, it will never erase my White privilege and the fact that the way I move through this world is vastly different than my Indigenous counterparts. I wonder about what the Indigenous people I am in relationship with would have to say about this White settler-Indigenous person dynamic.

Other reflections or questions about love that I made include how loving and tending to meaningful relationships can resist White supremacy by refusing individualism, a central indicator of White supremacy (Hunt & Holmes, 2015). How being open and generous with my love as a researcher also contributes to a White settler identity that is not defined by the boundaries in White supremacy but instead by a vision

of how relationships between White settlers and Indigenous peoples and communities *could* be. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar/activist/artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2016) speaks about the possible alternatives to our current society, and notes that “too much of our energy goes into trying to influence the system rather than creating the alternatives” (p. 24). Love in relationships is one way I see these alternatives being created. Saad (2020) reminds us of another reason for love in solidarity work:

You will also need love for this journey because when the truth telling gets really hard, you will need something more powerful than pain and shame to encourage you to keep going. Pain and shame are neither desirable nor sustainable as long--term strategies for transformational change (p.19).

I raised some important tensions on love in my journal entries. Although my love, hope and desires for a changed society are integral to my practice, I also use caution here not to romanticize solidarity or the current conditions of our society, and to think that love and relationships somehow absolve me of other responsibilities I have in solidarity (Flowers, 2015; Hunt & Holmes, 2015). Hunt and Holmes (2015) write that although love and intimate relationships have the power to enact solidarity in new ways, relationships are also places where colonial systems of power and domination are consistently reproduced.

I remember a time when I was on a canoe trip with my best friend, who is Sk̄w̄x̄w̄ú7mesh, and I didn't speak up when someone else said something racist.

Although my intention was not to speak over my friend, she let me know that, in the future, she would feel more supported if I interjected so that she would not be alone in addressing racist behaviour. Her feedback was a gift and likely due to our longstanding friendship. I also reflect that I cannot expect this generosity for every encounter I have

with an Indigenous or racialized person, when I feel that I have bungled a solidarity attempt. Now that I have a stronger foundation due to this research, any feelings of rejection, hurt, or defensiveness can hopefully be dealt with in a way that does not further harm the Indigenous or racialized person I am in relationship with.

I therefore raise some questions about my desire or interest in the possibility of relationships: am I drawn to a focus on relationships because it seems like a “quick fix” or a comfortable and desirable place to position myself as White settler? Am I leaning towards the area of building relationships so I can feel “forgiven” by Indigenous peoples and embody what a “good White settler” is (Flowers, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012)? Love as a central part of Indigenous worldviews is well documented throughout the literature (Allooloo, 2014; N. Clark, 2016b; Coulthard & Simpson, 2016; hooks, 1986; Laura, 2013, 2016; Moreno, 2019; Simpson, 2017). How do I love in my practice without appropriating Indigenous worldview or ignoring my other responsibilities as White settler? How do I learn about the ways my ancestors loved before White supremacy poisoned Europeans and created Whiteness? Does love exist in Whiteness? How can I love and not reinforce White supremacy on Indigenous peoples? Is that even possible?

### ***Relationships as Places to Resist White Supremacy***

The last sub theme on relationships that surfaced in the data is about how relationships can be sites to resist White supremacy when it includes a robust recognition and examination of power dynamics. I have outlined in the above section how love can be one way to resist White supremacy. Another way is through the power of a collective of people. This was partly drawn from my reflections on witnessing the growing collective of YFD. As I note in a journal entry, *there is power in numbers!* [May 5,

2022]. Every year there is a new group of youth in YFD from grades 8-12: some returning, and some new youth. Although most of the youth already know one another due to the small school size, in YFD they see one another in a different context, one that showcases different strengths and interests. I have seen new connections formed and always relish seeing how the group comes together and becomes stronger and louder in solidarity efforts. The connections between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, youth and Elders, and between youth and facilitators include joy, play, and friendship alongside solidarity efforts. Now that I have described how relationships can be places that develop solidarity work, places to envision new relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, and as places to resist White supremacy, I will share the arts-based reflection I created on my relationship with YFD (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Art based Reflection on my Relationship with YFD**



### *Art based Reflection on my Relationship with YFD*

This piece was created using an assemblage of photographs from my time facilitating YFD from 2014-2022. It represents past, present, and future relationships I hold with the youth, Elders, community members, along with all the art pieces, events, posters, buttons, drawings that have been created over the years. It is a messy image, just like my experience facilitating YFD. The image is filled with beautiful, powerful, amazing moments and memories. The greyness or “muddiness” of the image represents what does not get photographed: the moments of tension, hardship, tears, and struggles.

Some examples of these struggles include interpersonal conflicts or violence where group safety must be renegotiated, or times where activities we planned have flopped. Navigating differing opinions on Covid-19 vaccinations was an example of something we struggled with as facilitators this year. Typically, we welcome open discussions and address most topics brought up; however, when the issue of vaccine mandates was briefly raised, we did not address it directly and instead avoided the subject. I did not want to make anyone feel alienated, nor did I feel educated enough to address it comfortably or clearly.

I do not want to romanticize this work and frame YFD as being solely “positive” or “good”, and this piece is an attempt to bridge these two binaries of “good” and “bad” (de Finney et al., 2018; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Reynolds, 2010b). This hopes to resist tendencies of White saviourism that are present in the romanticization of Indigenous communities. In this image I attempt to hold and witness the *entirety* of this work. The layered images hold the complexities of the “both/and”, and allow my experiences with YFD to just be what it is. Powerful, dignified, positive, but also challenging and messy at

times. An example of this messiness includes navigating differing levels of support from school staff or differing values, or my own struggles of facilitating when I have become frustrated or overwhelmed. This image attempts to capture some of the intersections that exist in my relationship and work with YFD. Next, the witnessing intention of intersectionality will be discussed.

### **Witnessing Intention: Intersectionality**

Intersectional feminism is one of the theoretical lenses I use in my research, and was also found to be an important part of the literature on solidarity (Carlson et al., 2019; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1990; Reynolds, 2010a). This intention draws from the guiding intention of “addressing power” from Reynolds’ (2010b) six guiding intentions for justice-doing.

Intersectionality takes into account how multiple points of identity (such as gender, race, ability, class, and sexuality) interact and influence experiences, power, and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Initially I had used the quote “groundless solidarity, infinite responsibility” (Richard Day, p.18, as cited in Reynolds, 2010) as the title for one of the witnessing intentions to represent intersectionality. However, upon further reflection, this quote speaks more to an outward expression of intersectional solidarity and does not reflect the inward examination of one’s own intersectionality. Therefore, I changed the title of this witnessing principle to “intersectionality” to encompass both the inward and outward understandings of intersectionality.

Four of the journal entries reflected on the concept of intersectionality itself: one about the distinction between inward and outward intersectionality, two on the ability of intersectionality to hold multiple identities at once, and the overlaps or intersections

themselves. This is in addition to my insights on my own intersectional identity of being a neurodivergent White settler woman. Below, I will elaborate on the exploration of my own inward intersectionality, followed by some reflections on outward intersectionality.

### ***Inward Exploration Of My Own Intersectionality***

Over the past 15 years or so, through personal and academic explorations of my social location, I have become more aware of the intersections of my identity and how they fundamentally interact with my power and privilege. Through use of CAE in this research process I have gotten to know myself and the intersections of my identity better, namely, my recent ADHD diagnosis. In one journal entry, I reflect on how I went from thinking I had a firm grasp on my intersectional identity, to now being in a place of questioning and exploration: *My identity had become almost static... I thought I knew myself and had examined my identity and privilege in a robust way. And now with this diagnosis, it's like I have a whole new set of rocks to turn over, to explore, to feel tension about, to question [April 28, 2022]*. This shift in my own understanding of my identity reinforced the idea that some aspects of identity are not static, such as power or privilege, whereas the intersection of race does not change throughout a person's lifetime.

Eight of my journal entries explored the intersectional implications between this new understanding of my identity and White settler solidarity. Although I have been exploring both the struggles and gifts that neurodivergence brings to my solidarity, I must be careful to not center this discussion above unpacking my Whiteness, use it as a settler move to innocence, or as a way to excuse my White privilege and other privileges I experience such as my class, education, and cis-gendered privilege (Tuck & Yang, 2012). An example of my White privilege is in my experience accessing my ADHD diagnosis,

services, and medical care, which is vastly different from the racism that Indigenous and racialized people face when trying to access the same services (Harding, 2018; Phillips-Beck et al., 2020). In a journal entry I remind myself that *I must be careful not to claim anything that isn't mine, or take up space that isn't mine [June 9, 2022]*. This is a fledgling area of personal exploration and I am excited to learn more how this new piece of my identity impacts my attempts at solidarity as a White settler.

### ***Outward Intersectionality***

During my six years living in the North, I noticed fewer conversations around gender inclusivity, such as the inclusion of people's pronouns than I did living down south. In my work with YFD, I have felt a tension around being inclusive and not wanting to promote any White saviourship or supremacist thinking or the idea that *I know best [May 7th, 2022]*. I also reflected on how just because the YFD group has had conversations around gender and sexuality, it is not mainstream in many spaces in the North, from my experience. This intersectionality also aligns with the section on 2SLGBTQIA-Specific Calls for Justice in the final report on MMIWGT2S Calls for Justice (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019).

When reflecting on the question *who am I leaving behind?[June 7th, 2022]* in my work with YFD, I think of accessibility for people with disabilities, people who are struggling with active substance use, and people who are unhoused. Another clear tension is services for perpetrators of violence. Although the program is for youth in the high school, I have been cognizant about who is being left out when we plan community events or actions. Whilst I am typically not responsible for the decision-making on who is

invited to community events, I do wonder about my role as an organizer and facilitator of the program in creating space for those who are most marginalized in communities. In one journal entry I ask: *how can we open our arms to everyone in the community, while maintaining the safety of and centering survivors of violence?*[May 5th, 2022]. One way to address these questions is through the witnessing principle of embodied listening, which will be discussed next alongside some of the arts-based approaches I used to both describe and listen to embodied sensations.

### **Witnessing Intention: Embodied listening**

While this intention was not found in the literature on solidarity, it was a distinct aspect found in the literature on witnessing that I wished to explore in my research (Hunt, 2014; Lindroos & Möller, 2017; Reynolds, 2010a, 2010b). Embodied listening is about involving all your senses in your act of listening or witnessing and listening with our whole bodies and spirits (Hunt, 2014). The theme of embodied listening appeared in eight journal entries, and was informed by the four arts-based reflections I created.

My White socialization did not teach me to listen to myself or others in an embodied way that includes being aware of the messages my body is giving me in the form of physical sensations. However, one of the journal entries on intersectional identity was on how my neurodivergence provides the gift (and also burden) of being hyper-sensitive and having my senses be more amplified than a neurotypical person. Having increased sensory needs is challenging, however it also provides an opportunity to be more in tune with my senses, which lends itself to an embodied practice. In one journal entry I remark, *My body knows what to do. Listen to my body for the answer. This is the year I fall in love with my body and finally listen to it. I feel my core, my centre for the*

*first time in a long time [April 27th, 2022].* Developing my ability to listen to my body is connected to the ability to listen in an embodied way to my surroundings.

Creating arts-based reflections helped me to process, unpack, and express feelings that arose during my research. I was able to identify and confront feelings of perfectionism, an indicator of White supremacy, in the drips, smudges, and messiness of creating art on my research process. I also connect this shedding of perfectionism in my art making to the lesson in shedding the sense of perfectionism I have when I think of solidarity, or trying to be “good” or create what I have been socialized to believe is the perfect outcome. The literature is clear about art’s ability to make societal change (Hammond et al., 2018; Isaac & Decter, 2012; Khanna, 2011; Lindroos & Möller, 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Ward & Shortt, 2020; Wright, 2020). I tentatively wonder if art making can be a personally useful tool to address tensions that arise in White settler solidarity attempts. I typically learn best through visual examples instead of words, and having visual representations of my reflections through art-making was a powerful way to make meaning. Next, I will discuss a lesson on embodied listening I learned from beading, and an activity that supports embodied listening that can hold tensions within this work.

### ***A Lesson on Embodied Listening***

Beading my contribution for the collective art piece that was created by YFD to honour MMIWGT2S+ taught me an important lesson on embodied listening and the connection to solidarity. A few years ago, I was taught how to bead by my best friend, who is Sḱwḱwú7mesh. Since then, I have been taught by multiple others including the Elders in YFD that it is important to put positive energy and thoughts into your

beadwork. For example, if I got knots in my thread and became frustrated, I should take a step back and return to the project when I was feeling calm and centered. I was reminded of this lesson during the process of beading my contribution for the blanket, and it kept me centered on better energy as I beaded, facilitated YFD, and reflected on my research. Beading my contribution also helped me divest away from White supremacy in the way it asked me to slow down, and resist the sense of urgency and perfectionism that I was focused on and be present with my YFD work (Indigenous Action, 2014). Another lesson I received from the Elders in YFD over the years is that things have a way of working themselves out, and to not worry about the details. This is in contrast to the indicators of perfectionism and urgency from White supremacy that I was socialized with.

The first few days of our last sessions for YFD, I was feeling stress and a sense of urgency to write my thesis chapters and complete the collective art piece and make sure everything “got done”. When I sat down on the second evening to write a journal entry, it was the teaching from beading to slow down that reminded me that being present with the participants of YFD, and with this portion of the research, was more important than the self-imposed deadline I had created to finish my thesis. I acknowledged my feelings of perfectionism and named that I was *scared of not doing things perfectly [April 27th, 2022]*. I even semi-jokingly pondered in my journal entry: *we’ll see if this beading lesson helps with my irritability tomorrow [April 27th, 2022]*. This was a major shift in my thinking and the release from the tension I was feeling was palpable and allowed me to show up more fully for the participants of YFD. It was also a reminder that solidarity work is an “imperfection project” (Reynolds, 2013). I think it made me more present in

the research process and allowed me to experience a small slice of embodied listening, which in turn led to deeper insights about the research.

This intentional practice of embodied listening to self, slowing down, being present could be useful in both responding to and processing the more urgent or physical encounters that sometimes happen in community activism and organizing and will stay with me in my future solidarity attempts. Solidarity is not meant to be comfortable for White settlers and I have experienced discomfort at most community actions where I have been present. Reynolds (2010b) links discomfort with embodied listening: “I welcome this discomfort as a resource to the practitioner, a communication from the body which requires not a solution but an attending-to” (p.100). Listening in an embodied way and “attending-to” this discomfort could help me increase my threshold for being in uncomfortable situations (so I participate and potentially intervene in more actions), decipher when it is best to intervene in injustice or violence and when to make space, and be in tune with others around me at solidarity actions to better support the collective goal or purpose of the action.

I also need to acknowledge the tension around beading as a White settler due to the culture of knowledge theft, appropriation, and entitlement in White society. I lean into my relationships with the Indigenous people who have taught me beading, alongside the embodied discomfort and tension of appropriation and entitlement. I wonder about inhabiting this uncomfortable “both/and” place of and will discuss an embodied activity on holding on to contradictory feelings and thoughts next.

### ***Embodied Listening Activity to hold contradictions***

In May 2022, my peer Chelsea Jeffrey, who belongs to the anti-racism group for White settlers I attend, gifted me with an embodied activity. Solidarity attempts are often ripe with tensions and contradictions; this activity offers a way to process the big feelings that can accompany this work. The activity asks you to hold two opposing thoughts, ideas, or feelings, one in each hand. Examples of these tensions or contradictions that have come up for me include being a White settler facilitating YFD; doing labour as a White settler while not co-opting; listening to Indigenous voices while not needing to be told what to do at every turn; and making art about the subject of MMIWGT2S+ as a White settler. The activity then asks you to feel what it's like to hold these contradictions in each of your hands, followed by feeling what it's like to bring your hands together and have these contradictions get closer, interact, and maybe touch.

Doing this helped me to carve an intentional space to actually *feel* through these tensions instead of intellectualizing or thinking things through in a solely logical way. These contradictions and tensions typically have roots in White fragility, and have overwhelming feelings such as shame, embarrassment, and defensiveness attached to them. Thoughts such as “but that’s not what I meant”; “how could I have made this mistake”; or “can’t I do anything right?” have taken up space in my mind and are not as helpful as actually processing the *feelings* they are rooted in. This processing moves me closer to my goal of becoming more useful in my solidarity.

The literature on White guilt and fragility is clear about the importance of White settlers working through these feelings on our own and not putting labour on Indigenous people and this is one strategy to process these feelings to become more useful (Carlson

et al., 2019; Clemens, 2017; DiAngelo, 2018). Using a somatic or embodied approach is echoed throughout the work of Resma Menakem (2017), who connects embodied healing with social change and activism. Next, the witnessing principle of honouring resistance will be explored.

### **Witnessing Intention: Honouring Resistance**

This intention is directly pulled from Reynolds' (2010a) seven witnessing principles and Richardson and Reynolds (2012) work on collective ethics. Reynolds (2010b) also speaks to honouring resistance in the guiding intention "addressing power" in her six guiding intentions for justice-doing. This intention of Honouring Resistance also draws from Cruz (2011) and Lugones (2003) work on *faithful witnessing*, which describes a practice that is attuned to resistance. Resistance is also an important aspect of Response Based Practice (Richardson & Bonnah, 2015; Wade, 1997).

My focus on resistance stems from Reynolds' work, Response Based Practice, and that of other scholars, such as Leanne Simpson, Gabrielle Lindstrom, and Sandrina deFinney. A resistance approach asserts that wherever there is violence there is also resistance, and that victims always resist in a multitude of ways, sometimes not immediately obvious to the untrained eye (Coates & Wade, 2007; Reynolds, 2020; Richardson & Bonnah, 2015; Richardson & Reynolds, 2012; Wade, 1997). Reynolds (2010) also describes this resistance as "particular practices the person created to maintain connection with humanity in contexts that are outside of human understanding" (p. 163). Using a resistance approach refuses the trauma-based narrative that renders Indigenous peoples as deficient and in need of state intervention or "saving" (Clark, 2016b; Tuck, 2009). I join with many critical scholars who refuse to view "Indigenous

resistance to ongoing colonization and state violence as a symptom of trauma”

(Reynolds, 2020, p.348).

Throughout this research process, 11 of my journal entries were about resistance. In one journal entry, I reflect: *if I am going to speak about the participants of YFD, it's going to be from a dignity and resistance-based lens [January 26th, 2022]*. By centering and honouring the resistance of the participants of YFD, I also hope to address the harmful voyeurism that sometimes happens between White researcher and Indigenous subject.

Now that I have introduced the concept of resistance, I will next describe the collaborative art piece and event YFD organized for the National Day of Awareness for MMIWGT2S+ and the major takeaways on honouring resistance from my journal entries. This section will end with the voices of the YFD participants who decided to share their own reflections.

### ***The Collaborative Art Piece***

Once the YFD group had decided that we were going to make a blanket to go alongside the previous MMIWGT2S+ red dress art piece we had made in 2019 (Figure 2), the group began making contributions for the blanket in March 2022. Some youth beaded, while others painted or did embroidery. The Elders beaded contributions. Many chose to bead a red dress, which has become a symbol for the MMIWGT2S+ movement. When the hide arrived, the group noticed that it looked similar to a dress shape, and one youth suggested that we attach the natural hide belt to add some contrast and to match some of the beaded red dresses that had been made. The art piece went by a few different names in the process: the “blanket”, the “shawl”, and the “red dress”. Although probably

a bit confusing, these multiple names also perhaps created the opportunity for the piece to be multiple things at once.

The group members worked on their contributions over the March, April, and May sessions. We began sewing in May and finished the blanket the morning of the community event that was planned for May 5<sup>th</sup>, the National Day of Awareness for MMIWGT2S. An image of the completed collaborative art piece is below (Figure 9).



### *The Event*

The youth, along with members of the Advocates program (a program similar to YFD for adults), planned an event for the National Day of Awareness for MMIWGT2S+ on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2022. It included an opening prayer, drumming by the Kaska Drummers, drumming by the YFD group, followed by a march, speeches by the youth, advocates, and chief of Liard First Nation, and the unveiling of the blanket. This was followed by a community lunch at the high school, and a ceremony to honour the youth in YFD.

Around 200 people came, which is nearly a quarter of the population of Watson Lake. It was incredible to witness the hard work of the youths and their contributions. Many wore their regalia, YFD hoodies, or red shawls, and held posters that they had made about MMIWGT2S+. Several community members noted how special it was to see the youth drumming in front of the community.

**Figure 10: Community event for National Day of Awareness for MMIWGT2S+**



**Figure 11: YFD group after unveiling collaborative art piece**



***Art as Co-Witness and a way to Honour Resistance***

The second part of my research question asks about the ways in which art can be a *co-witness or co-conspirator*. There were multiple layers of art and witnessing in my research such as: the collaborative art piece and the art reflections I created as White settler. The collaborative art piece and event functioned as witness to MMIWGT2S+ and their families. I am mindful of differences between my own witnessing as White settler, and the witnessing by the Indigenous participants of YFD.

Eight of my journal entries spoke to the theme of art as resistance, which connects to how art can be a co-conspirator or witness. In one, I reflect on a teaching from my Gitxsan friend Gina Mowatt on how art can be the language through which resistance is communicated (personal communication, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022). This is congruent with what some literature says on how art can be a mechanism or a venue to speak truth to power (Hammond et al., 2018; Isaac & Decker, 2012; Lindroos & Möller, 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Ward & Shortt, 2020; Wright, 2020). Wright (2020) adds that art can provide tools for youth to create change and a way to envision their ideal identities and systems. In one journal entry I explain: *When I see the youth, who seem aloof in typical teen fashion, or who don't always seem super engaged, suddenly become interested in creating change or justice-doing through art, it's one of my favourite parts of this job [May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022].*

The next connection made among art, witness, resistance, and solidarity in three of my journal entries centers on how the collective art piece refuses to erase the violence towards Indigenous bodies from settler colonialism. In one, I speak about how *the blanket honours YFD and the community of Watson Lake's resistance. It refuses to let the violence of Canada and settler colonialism be erased [June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022].* The creation of this art piece and the May 5<sup>th</sup> event by YFD is a visible demonstration of a community (and of me as White settler researcher) refusing to stay silent on violence towards Indigenous bodies. I write more on how the collaborative art piece is a physical reminder of not only honouring the MMIWG2S+ and their families, but also the resistance of the YFD group in another entry: *The blanket being placed in a visible spot in the school alongside the red dress refuses to let it be a subject that is unspeakable, erased, or*

*forgotten. It contributes to the collective energy of dismantling the violent systems that created the issue of MMIWGT2S+ [June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022].*

Honouring resistance is an important part of my solidarity praxis as White settler as it breathes life into my work (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012). I have witnessed first-hand the change in energy in a room or individual when the resistance strategies they used to keep their dignity intact are the focus instead of the symptoms of trauma or the pain. In one journal entry I remark, *when we talk about resistance, you can see the youth getting fired up [May 5th, 2022]*. I see my role as White settler facilitator as one that *facilitates opportunities for everyone to showcase their resistance, whether that be verbally, through art, or any other way they have chosen to express themselves [June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022]*. Something I strive for in my facilitation and solidarity work is to get youth excited and “fired up” about activism, resistance, creating change, and justice-doing (Reynolds, 2010b).

### ***Vignettes from Participants***

This part of the chapter will include the words of YFD participants who chose to share a reflection for my research. Whether or not to include these vignettes was a tension that came up in my research. In collaboration with my graduate committee, we decided that it was important to include the voices of the YFD participants. I have been gifted these statements to put in this thesis and to live alongside collaborative art piece. It was important for me to not speak over or for their lived experiences. The participants of YFD are key to my work, research, and solidarity as a White settler and I wanted to create a space for participants to share their experience in an unaltered and unanalyzed way. Tuck and Yang (2012) speak to the tension between researchers’ and participants’ voices:

“How do we learn from and respect the wisdom and desires in the stories that we (over) hear, while refusing to portray/betray them to the spectacle of the settler colonial gaze?” (p. 223, in Chadwick 2019, p. 87).

Five participants, three Elders and two youth (one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous), chose to share about their experience with YFD, making the blanket, and/or MMIWGT2S+ and contribute to my research in a powerful, personal, familial, emotional way that is unique and separate from anything I could understand as White settler outsider. I have chosen to house the participants’ contributions under this witnessing principle of honouring resistance as a way to uphold the resistance of each of the participants that chose to share with me.

***Colleen Caesar***

*I’m really happy to be invited to attend this with the youth, the project that they are working on for MMIW. they brought a lot of inspiration to me and seeing them all and all the projects they've done just made me so happy, listening to them sing brought tears to my eyes yesterday. I just felt overwhelmed seeing them all together. And that project, I just felt a lot of pride and saw that they’re so happy being in there. And I just hope that this program continues.*

***Elder Rose Mallay Caesar***

*I’m concerned about and really got involved with MMIW because I had a sister and aunt and cousin close to me that was murdered, and a lot of cases still today have not been solved. All these MMIW are our family members, our mothers, our sisters, and they're our residential school school mates, and we never really never knew what happened with them, or what happened with the situation they were in. I’m just concerned because this has to stop, and we need to know all the details that happened to the individuals that are really dear to us. In the years passed, and just lately in the last 4 years people are really stepping up to the plate and asking questions: what happened? What happened to my sister? How was she murdered? Do you have any evidence? The RCMP now are getting involved. Finally getting involved in cases that they closed and said it was a closed case, that they can't really come to conclusions about... but now things are changing because women are stepping up to the plate and saying No. we want answers for our sisters. We want answers for our mum, we want answers for our nephews and nieces. See what*

*happened with them when they passed, how did it happen? How come the investigation stopped? On what terms? Our Kaska nation has lost lots of our women to MMIW and we want some answers. And it's really important to have answers. We got a lot of young beautiful Kaska women that are gonna take our place and I don't want anything happening to them in the future. So this subject is very dear and I'm getting involved with Youth for Dignity and they do lots of work on violence, resistance, and giving support to each other. It's just really amazing the work they do. Find their answers for a lot of things, they participate in this group, and one of the subjects they always study is MMIW because of violence.*

***Elder Mary Charlie***

*We're doing a blanket on the topic of MMIW. It's very important for me to do this because my sister was murdered in the 60s and we never got information on it. I'd really like to find out more information on the family. MMIW is very important to me and working with the students at the highschool to do a blanket. We've beaded a lot of red dresses on it and I'm amazed at the work the students did with me and I'm really proud of them. I'm doing this for the honour of the murdered and missing women and girls in our community of Watson Lake. It means a lot to me. Thank you very much.*

***Logan Noel***

*I feel very close to this project because I am an Indigenous woman. When we started this project my first thought was "I'm going to participate because it sounds cool and all my friends are doing it". But as the project went on and the more I learned about it and the topic and the reason, I started doing it because I wanted to, I wanted to speak up and spread awareness because these women, girls, trans, and 2 spirit people +, they lost their lives and voices because of violence, so we will speak up. We will not be silenced because they will not be forgotten.*

***Andrew Kearns***

*My name is Andrew Kearns, I have been in Youth for Dignity three years and counting. The red shawl/blanket project means everything to me. I am a survivor of sexual assault, I know the numbers of this for MMIWGT2S is higher. By being in solidarity as a non-Indigenous person, I feel I can support those in need, and use my voice to speak up.*

These vignettes from participants are powerful gifts that enriched my research. It was an honour to sit with the participants and hear their stories. The intention of listening and recording their contributions was a small act of solidarity in honouring and witnessing their resistance and realities. Their words highlight the personal, familial, and

relational experience of MMIWGT2S+ in a way that I could never know. In the contribution from the non-Indigenous participant, they make the important distinction between their experiences of violence and the experiences of Indigenous peoples.

### **Witnessing Intention: Action**

The requirement of action in both solidarity and witnessing was clear from the literature review (Carlson et al., 2019; Clemens, 2017; Curnow & Helferty, 2018; Flowers, 2015; Indigenous Action, 2014; Kraemer, 2007; Tuck & Yang, 2012). I drew this witnessing intention from Reynolds' (2010a) assertion that witnesses must not only listen but *act* in ways that promote justice, and the guiding intention of “*doing solidarity*” from Reynolds (2010b) six guiding intentions for justice-doing. Richardson and Reynolds (2012) also point to “enacting solidarity” in their work on collective ethics for staying alive in the work. The witnessing intention of action showed up in thirteen journal entries. This section will describe the specific actions present in the research, and the tensions that go alongside them.

White settler solidarity without action changes nothing (Tuck & Yang, 2012). As I reflect in one of my journal entries, *My purpose is not to feel good as a settler, it's to be most useful and change oppressive systems [November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022]*. Another goal of this deep exploration through Critical Autoethnography is to better understand where my place is as a White settler working towards a just society, as everyone brings unique gifts and struggles to movements of change. In one journal entry I wonder: *Where is my place in the revolution? Answer: Wherever I am needed [June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022]*.

I aim to move toward a specific understanding of solidarity and justice-doing. I cannot simply claim that I am in solidarity with someone or a certain community: I must

be able to identify *how* I am living that solidarity. As Black scholar, activist, and narrative therapist Travis Heath (2021) explains, it is not enough to simply name our ethical positions, such as being anti-racist, around an issue; we must be able to identify the actual actions present that reinforce those ethical positions.

The actions embedded in this research come by way of my work with Youth For Dignity (YFD), as a large component of YFD is organizing actions or events to address violence or other social justice issues. Past YFD actions include art pieces, such as the red dress for MMIWGT2S+ made in 2019, along with a mural to honour MMIWGT2S+, as well as the installation of signs in the Sign Post Forest that said “Stop Rape”<sup>10</sup>, button-making campaigns, letters and meetings with town officials, a petition, and community events and dinners to raise awareness about gendered violence and MMIWGT2S+. This year and throughout my research process, the focus in YFD was on the creation of our collaborative art piece and the community event on May 5<sup>th</sup> to honour MMIWGT2S+ and to refuse to erase and stay silent about colonial violence.

An imperative aspect of engaging in actions of justice-doing and solidarity as a White settler is to follow the lead of Indigenous voices (Carlson et al., 2019; Flowers, 2015; Kraemer, 2007; Walia, 2012). This showed up in my research with the reflection that I constantly and will continue to navigate how to balance my role as White settler facilitator with this requirement. A few times I caught myself reinforcing White supremacy by wanting things done a certain way on the MMIWGT2S+ blanket project. Once, for example, an Elder started to work on my beaded contribution for the blanket

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<sup>10</sup> The Sign Post Forest is a popular tourist attraction in Watson Lake where visitors have put up thousands of signs. By installing both our mural to honour MMIWGT2S+ and several Stop Rape signs there, visitors are reminded that this is not just a highway stop for tourists, but land that is still occupied and taken care of by Kaska people. This also refuses the romanticized gold rush narratives of the north.

and I felt like this was somehow wrong because *I* was the one who needed to finish it. I quickly shed this possessiveness and shifted into feeling gratitude and joy that the art was now even more collaborative, and that this whole art piece was about the collective and not the individual. This is another example of how I confronted feelings of perfectionism in my thesis.

I have noticed that the past year or two have felt less action-based than previously, which outlines a gap in my solidarity practice. In one journal entry, I reflect on the actions that I am willing and not willing to do: *What is the work that I am unwilling to do? Thinking about the reasons why I do and don't show up to certain events or actions, what am I willing to give up? My job? Health? Safety? Comfort? Criminal record? [June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022].* Through my research reflections, I have become clearer on a possible reason behind my lack of action over the past year, and how to address it. I have come to realize how important relationships are in getting involved in community organizing and participating at actions, because I have lacked community since moving to W̱SÁNEĆ and ləkʷəŋən lands in 2020. I do not say this as an excuse, but as a pathway to action and becoming more useful: if I know relationships are important, I must focus on building community with like-minded people, and also work on increasing my threshold of discomfort about attending events alone.

One way that I have been trying to fill this gap in action is by contributing to mutual aid. I wrestled with the tension of receiving a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant as a White settler to complete this research and decided to re-distribute a third of what I received, mostly in mutual aid or in occasional contributions to organizations like the Indian Residential School Survivors Society. Mutual aid is defined

as “a form of political participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing political conditions, not just through symbolic acts or putting pressure on their representatives in government but by actually building new social relations that are more survivable” (Spade, 2020, p. 136). Many activists call for wealth redistribution and mutual aid over charity; the benefits of giving smaller amounts more often to those in direct need over larger sums is to reduce the internalized biases when it comes to deciding who is worthy of support, and to mitigate tendencies of White saviourism (Pocketchange Pools, 2021; TRP @ 916, 2022). Although redistribution of wealth and mutual aid are pieces of my solidarity as a White settler, they cannot be the only part.

I struggle with the tension of listing out these actions as “receipts” to somehow prove that I am in solidarity and wonder about the possibility of naming these actions as a settler move to innocence. Furthermore, I identify a tension of how the actions I engage with in YFD are a part of my paid employment and cannot forget about what I do in my unpaid work. One way to evaluate the ethics and tensions of these actions and my solidarity attempts more generally is through accountability.

### **Witnessing Intention: Accountability**

The importance of accountability was clear in the literature on solidarity (Carlson et al., 2019; Goodman, 2001; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Reynolds, 2013; Walia, 2012). This intention comes directly from one of Reynolds’ (2010a) seven witnessing principles, “cultural and collective accountability”. Accountability is also found in Reynolds (2010b) six guiding intentions for justice doing, in the guiding intentions of “centering ethics”, and “structuring safety”.

As outlined in the literature review, accountability is essential for ethical solidarity, for reducing the risk of perpetuating harm, for evaluating ourselves and what our obligations are, and identifying who we answer to (Carlson et al., 2019; Goodman, 2001; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Reynolds, 2012, 2013; Walia, 2012). Accountability most often is defined by a willingness to be responsible for one's own actions, as I need to do. But I am also bound by collective accountability, a principle from Reynolds' (2010) witnessing framework. She writes that "accountability is something that we do together in relationship. Individual accountability can be a limiting idea, especially if it constructs the responsibility for social contexts of injustice as a personal project" (p. 173).

Accountability was a theme in 10 of my journal entries. The main ways that accountability appears in my research are: in my reflections on the relationships of accountability that guide me and my research, some gaps in my research that I need to be accountable for, and ways that I have attempted accountability.

### ***Relationships of accountability***

Although my research centres on my own experience as a White settler, it also involves collective accountability with the relationships held in this research: my committee members Dr. Sarah Wright Cardinal and Dr. Laurie Harding, and my external examiner Dr. Cindy Holmes; my YFD community which includes my boss, Ann Maje Raider, the LAWS staff and Elders, the YFD group, my co-facilitator, and the town of Watson Lake; and all the friends with whom I had conversations or who read and suggested edits of my thesis.

My supervisor Dr. Wright Cardinal and committee member Dr. Harding have provided invitations to accountability through conversations and by posing essential

questions to keep me accountable to the constant examination of self as White settler and to keep the focus on my research questions. A lot of rich learning on my roles and responsibilities as White settler was the result of their feedback. As external examiner, Dr. Cindy Holmes will provide crucial feedback from the standpoint of an expert in the field.

The YFD group is another relationship of accountability. My research exploration has brought another layer of intention to maintaining an ethical, respectful relationship with LAWS and YFD after my research is complete. When YFD resumes in October 2022, I will have to answer questions from the Elders and youth about how my research went.

In one journal entry, I wonder about what accountability looks like for me as a White settler in Watson Lake: *I wonder how comfortable the Elders and youth feel in giving me feedback? How may they already have communicated feedback in ways that I may have missed? [June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022].* This reflection led me to identify a current gap in my research and practice as YFD facilitator: that there are few channels for me to receive feedback from the YFD group, and this is an area that needs attention. Although we do a lot of team-building activities to build safety and talk about our own power and privilege in the group, the power differences that exist between me as an adult White facilitator and the rest of the group will always be there. This means that no matter how much I am attuned to power and attempt respectful and dignified facilitation, my privilege sticks around and may influence others' comfort in providing feedback to me or engaging me with accountability.

I propose how it could look for the group to create a more intentional system of accountability, grounded in Kaska culture if appropriate, where participants would feel comfortable giving me feedback. In another journal entry, I questioned *what will be the consequences of my actions if I make a misstep?* [June 16th, 2022]. Realizing I did not know the answer to that question made me think about the lack of systems of accountability I have in place to navigate my relationships.

Another journal entry reflected on the accountability I have to the non-Indigenous YFD participants, and increasing their interest in solidarity, and exploring their roles as settlers engaged in activism and social change. Furthermore, Reynolds (2010) writes that as White settlers, it can be alluring to construct ourselves as different from other White settlers who may engage in racism or violence. However, “accountability invites me to step up, lean into my white brother, and find our way forward together. This is not based on me being a good person, but on my understanding that all racism benefits me as a member of the dominant culture, whether I perform it or not” (Reynolds, 2010, p. 173). This is a gap in my own solidarity, as I sometimes choose to instead distance myself from people I deem racist, or denounce their actions instead of engaging with them. It will be essential for me to continue my personal journey of healing my own wounds around rejection and self-worth so that I am better able to engage with feedback, accountability, and inviting other White settlers into accountability in justice-doing. This is one way that I can learn to engage with viewpoints that are different than my own.

Another gap in my research that I need to be accountable for is the inaccessibility of the language of Witnessing. Witnessing is not something that I can explain in one or two sentences. It requires a conversation, and a contextual understanding of the seven

Witnessing Intentions explored in my research. This has been evident in my struggles to explain my research to others in a brief way, or when I explained what my research was about to the YFD group. The clunkiness of the language around witnessing makes me wonder about its broader usefulness and if my proposed Witnessing Intentions are better suited to an inward, personal framework than one that is talked about: *If it is how I will walk the talk instead of talking the talk [June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022]*. Through setting the parameters of witnessing through my proposed seven Witnessing Intentions, it has helped me gain clarity on how to explain at least one small slice of what witnessing can encompass. It will be interesting to see how the YFD group receives my proposed Witnessing Intentions and my emerging Solidarity Practice in the next year of the program. de Finney and colleagues (2018) remind us not to shy away from talking about complex or politicized subjects, especially with people and communities who have vast lived experience with racism that I never will have.

### ***Attempts at Accountability***

One small way that I attempt to care for these relationships of accountability is through practices of reciprocity by gifting. Each of the relationships mentioned above have provided me with countless gifts in teachings, time, and care that have contributed immensely to my research, my solidarity practice, and life. I plan to show reciprocity not only in the material gifts that I have given, but also to return the non-material care I have been given.

Another relationship that invites collective accountability and will support me to maintain this work sustainably is the bi-weekly anti-racist group for White settlers that I am a part of. Having a group of White people who are invested in social change and

intentionally unpacking Whiteness and tensions within solidarity is important as I continue with this lifelong work. This aims to reduce the labour for my Indigenous and racialized friends when navigating the complications that present themselves in White settler solidarity. Examples of such labour include education, emotional processing, or expecting them to be mindful of my own comfort. It is important to be on the lookout for perspectives we may miss as White settlers due to the differences of lived experience between White privilege and the experiences of Indigenous and racialized people. An example of this in my own research was initially centering my ADHD diagnosis over a critique of my Whiteness, and not acknowledging the differences between my ADHD diagnosis and that of Indigenous peoples, who face racism and violence in the health care system which I will never experience (Harding, 2018).

I have discussed a few relationships that provide me with invitations to accountability in this work. Now, I extend an invitation to you, the reader, to engage with accountability in this thesis: I have included a feedback form for readers to provide critiques, ask questions, or raise concerns with this thesis or my actions (Appendix B). The feedback can be anonymous to increase the safety of those who may not feel comfortable sharing their names. The idea for this form came from Margeaux Feldman, a White Queer writer who used similar community accountability forms to address concerns that others raised about her work. The people in Feldman's solidarity relationships are also sent the feedback as an added measure of accountability. This is something that I can explore with my own future solidarity relationships. I will also inquire with the YFD group members if they would like to try out this anonymous feedback form to increase accountability within my facilitation work.

Although these relationships of accountability are important to White settler solidarity and ethical praxis, as Reynolds (2010) reminds us, solid and ethical accountability does not undo the violence that has already been committed by White supremacy, colonialism, settler colonialism, and all the ways that these systems are replicated by White settler “allies”.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter was a discussion of the major themes that emerged from the research process, and the connections between these themes and my research questions: *In what ways can witnessing function as a useful practice framework for White Settler solidarity? Secondly, how can art act as witness or co-conspirator?* The discussion was based on 70 journal entries that I wrote from September 2021 to June 2022. It first outlined the approach to data analysis, followed by a discussion of a critical authnoethnographic White settler Emerging Practice for Justice-Doing. Two arts-based reflections were included: one on the shift in research from PAR to an inward exploration of self through arts-based CAE, and one on the relationship between myself and YFD. The final chapter which will outline a summary of my thesis, contributions from my research, and recommendations.

## Chapter 5: Recommendations

There are a lot of different ideas and views from both racialized and White scholars, activists, and practitioners about White settler solidarity. My research engages with the possibilities of one small piece: witnessing as a pathway to justice-doing for White settlers. Through the discussion of the seven witnessing intentions in Chapter 4, I was able to outline some of the ways that a White settler CYC practitioner can engage and reflect on solidarity work. Through use of arts-based methods and discussion of the collaborative art piece made with YFD, I was able to explore some of the ways that art can act as co-witness or co-conspirator. The reflections I've made through critical autoethnography and arts based methods have helped me to look inward at my research questions: *In what ways can witnessing function as a useful practice framework for White settler solidarity? Secondly, how can art function as a co-witness or co-conspirator?*

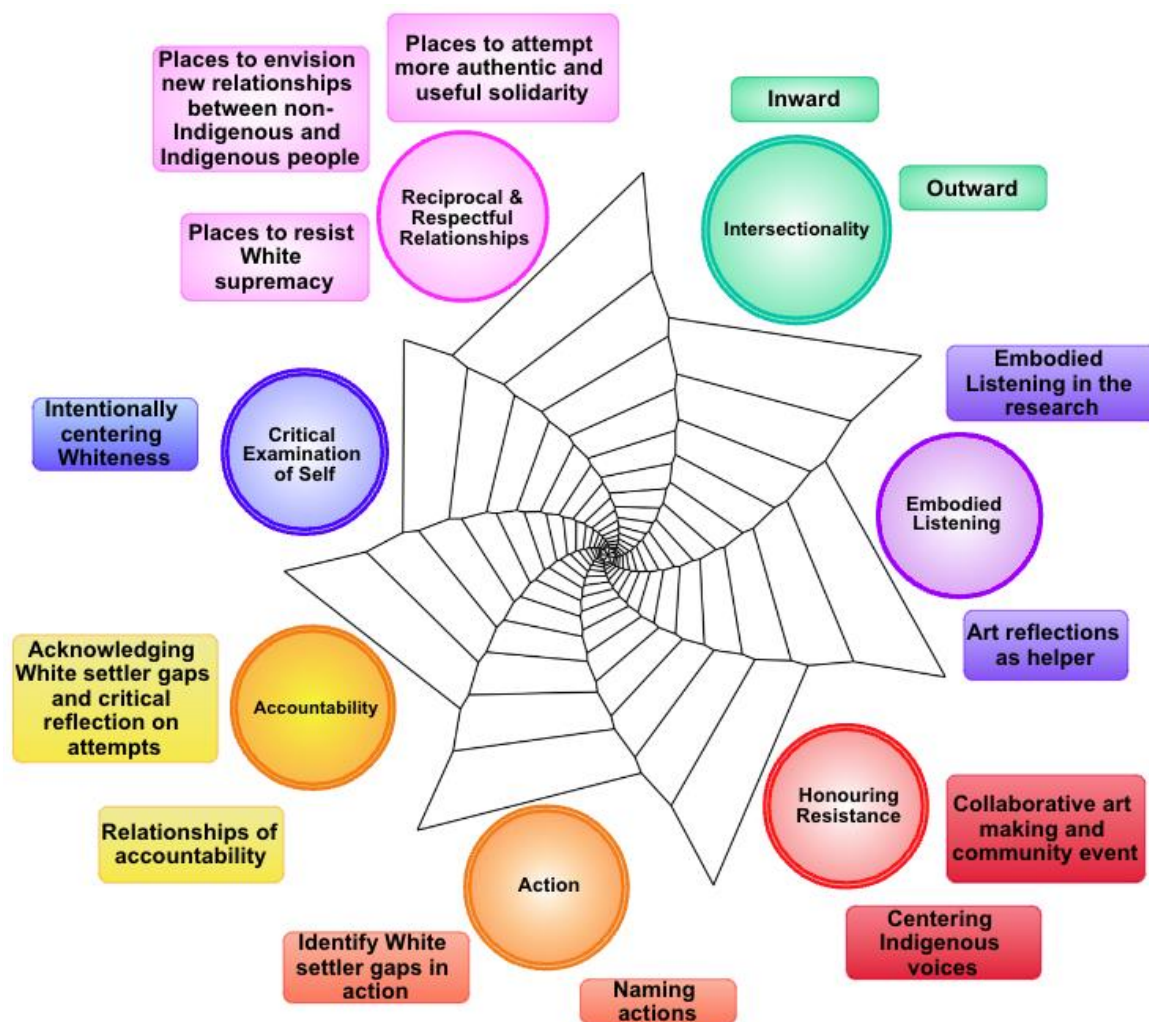
I will now discuss the contents of my thesis and outline possible contributions my research offers. I will end with personal recommendations, recommendations for CYC practitioners, and recommendations for further research, followed by parting words.

### Discussion

This research has been an exploration of my research question: *In what ways can witnessing function as a useful practice framework for White settler solidarity? Secondly, how can art function as a co-witness or co-conspirator?* First, I discussed what the literature says about Whiteness, and White settler solidarity and witnessing. The process of undertaking the literature review also functions to continue my own learning about the subjects of White settler solidarity and witnessing. Then, using a methodology of arts-based critical autoethnography, I have engaged in a critical examination of self as

White settler. To inform this critical examination, I have reflected on my role as White settler facilitating Youth for Dignity (YFD) and my experience thus far in solidarity, mostly through journal entries, which I collected from September 2021 to June 2022. By creating arts-based reflections throughout my research process and reflecting on the creation of the collaborative art piece with YFD, I was able to attend to my second research question and explore ways that art can be a co-witness or co-conspirator. Furthermore, the collaborative art piece functions as a way to witness MMIWGT2S+ and their families, and to honour the resistance of the participants of YFD and the community of Watson Lake to colonial violence. The evolution of this research resulted in seven witnessing intentions which make up A White Settler Emerging Solidarity Practice for Justice-Doing. Below is a visual representation of how I enacted this practice in my research (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: How I Enacted my Emerging Solidarity Practice for Justice-Doing**



It is my hope that this thesis will be useful for any reader who struggles with all the complexities and contradictions that come alongside White settler solidarity. Each of the seven witnessing intentions have provided lessons and opportunities for growth in my solidarity as a White settler CYC practitioner invested in working towards a more just future and carry the potential for similar growth in others. Through the deep reflections and examination of self, I have been able to identify that focusing on self, Whiteness, and

White supremacy currently feels like the right ethical direction for my solidarity. This inward focus resists White saviourism, the pathologizing of Indigenous peoples, and research that replicates colonial and White supremacist notions of domination and control (MacKenzie, 2019). It identifies the main issue or problem to be investigated as White supremacy, which is located within White society and not within Indigenous and racialized peoples (de Finney et al., 2018; MacKenzie, 2019).

The seven witnessing intentions that make this White Settler Emerging Solidarity Practice for Justice-Doing can act as a necessary structure to contain the tsunami of thoughts and feelings that come alongside my neurodivergence. I was also able to think through in a critical way how this newer aspect of my identity impacts my intersectionality, and how to maintain focus on unpacking White privilege and my role in solidarity.

Probing into the relationship principle of Witnessing has allowed me to consider the lessons in solidarity I have learned because of the relationships I hold. Furthermore, my research highlighted how these relationships can be places to envision new relationships between White settlers and Indigenous people, and as places to resist White supremacy. That being said, a critical examination is needed to acknowledge and address the risks and limitations of romanticizing or erasing the valid anger and critiques from Indigenous people (Flowers, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

The importance of intersectionality was highlighted by critically examining my own identity and neurodivergence. Furthermore, I investigated the ways in which my work with YFD upholds the ideal of intersectionality, and the ways it leaves some people out. This thesis is just a tiny piece of all that encompasses solidarity work. In reflecting

on “groundless solidarity and infinite responsibility”, I am reminded that more work is needed to explore other intersections between White settler solidarity and issues such as anti-Black racism, critical disability, unhoused communities, the opioid crisis, abolition, and transformative justice.

Embodied listening was a particularly interesting piece of my research as it allowed me to explore the tensions of White settler solidarity in an arts-based way that captures the nebulous parts of my work and research that I find indescribable or undefinable. There are so many layers and intersections of my experiences of solidarity and work with YFD as a White settler that I hadn’t addressed before this research. The arts-based reflections I created provided access to layers of witnessing in an embodied way. I expressed the messy, tension-filled, rhizomatic(Reynolds, 2010b), interconnected, and overlapping nature of my relationships of solidarity in a way I hadn’t before.

Honouring resistance is a key aspect of my praxis as CYC practitioner and budding clinical counsellor. Through my research and reflecting on the collaborative art piece made by YFD and the event for the May 5<sup>th</sup> National Day of Awareness for MMIWGT2S+, I explored the intersection of honouring resistance and art, and how art can be a language or vehicle to not only resist, but also to honour resistance and be a witness. The public physical location of our collaborative art piece also serves as resistance to the efforts of White supremacy, colonialism, and settler colonialism to erase both the violence it creates, and to witness the ever-present resistance from Indigenous peoples. Honouring the resistance of the participants of YFD was a reminder how this focus, instead of pathology and trauma symptoms, invites accountability into my work as

White settler, and brings in a necessary hope to solidarity work that White supremacy works hard to render hopeless (Reynolds, 2020).

Being useful in my solidarity attempts is at the core of my research and the requirement of action is at the core of solidarity and justice-doing (Reynolds, 2020). It makes me question, *what am I going to actually DO with all this research/thinking/feeling/processing?* [June 22nd, 2022]. Although there are examples of action in my research, my time during this process has felt unbalanced, and I have identified a lack of personal action. However, I have also been able to explore the potential causes behind this, namely, a lack of community and relationships, and this thesis stands as a re-commitment to address my current barriers at being more action-based in my solidarity.

Finally, an intentional exploration into accountability has given me the opportunity to acknowledge my current relationships and the opportunity to envision future systems of accountability as a White settler. Accountability reflects how I will ethically stay on track in my solidarity attempts. As Reynolds (2010) writes, “as an act of solidarity the witness has an ethical responsibility to respond to the social contexts that make possible and support attacks on human dignity” (p. 178).

The non-linear, interconnected, and embodied nature of my emerging solidarity practice for justice-doing gives me a necessarily flexible structure to respond to the challenges and tensions that come alongside White settler solidarity. It provides a potential place to stand as White settlers, who often wonder where they belong in movements of change (Reynolds, 2002, 2010). A necessary question to follow this point is, who gets to decide what is useful or helpful? How will I know? There is an obvious

tension of proposing a pathway for solidarity given my own Whiteness. This contradiction reinforces my desire to focus on Whiteness and White supremacy as targets of my future investigations, in solidarity with Indigenous and racialized collaborators. My emerging solidarity practice is not meant to be perfect or set in stone, but imperfect and adaptable: I plan to continue to evolve and morph it into whatever it needs to be for changing times and contexts. This reflects my hopes for usefulness and going where I am needed in solidarity, whether that be in organizing, washing the dishes, wealth redistribution, or just shutting up and getting out of the way.

### **Recommendations for Self**

My Emerging Solidarity Practice for Justice-Doing is not a place to “arrive” to, nor one to settle into. It is a tool to unpack my Whiteness and privilege continually, and become more useful in my solidarity attempts. By exploring my practices of justice-doing, I have critically examined myself with intention, and areas of recommendation for myself have become more clear.

One is for me to continue to explore how to rebalance my solidarity towards a practice that is more action-based. As Ahmed (2004) writes, there are clear limits to “declaring one’s Whiteness” without backing it up with concrete actions (in Mackenzie, 2019, p.110). Furthermore, “declaring one’s whiteness, even as a part of critical reflection, can reproduce white settler privilege. Exploring white settler privilege in CYC cannot just be a performance, task, or self-location exercise for white people to park their guilt and anxieties in addressing racism” (Ahmed, 2004, in Mackenzie, 2019, p.111).

Another important personal recommendation is to develop the systems of accountability that are lacking in my practice. This includes developing strong solidarity

relationships within my professional life as a budding clinical counsellor, in the form of supervision and peer supervision with other justice-oriented counsellors. I have identified a few classmates and local counsellors who share my visions of solidarity and are potential people with whom to develop practices of solidarity. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2016) is one of many hopeful voices who speak about the importance of creating alternatives to our current systems instead of just fighting them. I am drawn to this envisioning work and excited to explore these possibilities with the solidarity relationships I currently hold and will develop. It is also important for me to remember not to feel entitled to this shared future between settlers and Indigenous peoples (Flowers, 2015). Romanticizing or dreaming up a shiny bright future is not only a move to innocence but also “risks co-opting and erasing important differences between Indigenous people and settlers—all while (re)centering the colonizer by prioritizing their desire for recognition from the colonized” (Flowers, 2015; Indigenous Feminist Collective, 2022, pt. 3).

Using art as a co-witness or co-conspirator in this solidarity research brought a richness to my practice and allowed me to express myself and engage with the tensions in this work intentionally. Continuing to develop this arts practice is another area of personal recommendation and growth. As someone who often struggles with her words, using art as co-witness gives me a new language to resist and act in solidarity, and a tool to further process and unpack contradictions. These following recommendations apply to wider, systemic needs.

## **Recommendations for CYC**

This research is one way I answer the call from other CYC practitioners to engage in a critical, politicized practice and “move beyond the framework of colonialism and engage with different concepts, dogmas, and practice” (de Finney et al., 2018; Kouri, 2019; MacKenzie, 2019, p. 133). Further recommendations for White CYC scholars and practitioners include continuing to explore how to unpack our Whiteness and to consider how we can be of use to the communities we serve.

I invite other White settlers to join me in continuing to figure out how to dismantle White supremacy within the field of CYC and ourselves. How can we expose and demolish the indicators of White supremacy that exist in our workplaces and field, and build new ways forward without co-opting the knowledges of Indigenous and racialized peoples? Echoing the sentiments of other critical White scholars such as Kouri (2019), Mackenzie (2019), and Reynolds (2020), what are the ways we can further focus our attention on dismantling White supremacy and our own cultures of domination and violence, instead of “helping” marginalized communities and treading into the waters of White saviourism? How can we take accountability and responsibility for our White peers and co-workers who are reproducing colonial harms (Reynolds, 2010)? The final report of the National Inquiry into MMIWGT2S+ (2019) provides suggested accountabilities, outlined below.

Engaging with the topic of MMIWGT2S+ is a vital component of the YFD program. The final report of the National Inquiry into MMIWGT2S+ (2019), demands calls for justice from health and wellness service providers that pertain to this research and my work with YFD. Article 7.3. calls for health and wellness providers to support

Indigenous-led programs and prevention initiatives such as YFD. Although there is strong Elder support, a current gap in the YFD program is that there is no Kaska facilitator. Article 7.7 and 7.8 call for programs to support Indigenous people to train in health and wellness, which reinforces the recommendation that a Kaska person should be hired and trained to facilitate alongside or in place of me and my co-facilitator. This year we had an interested Kaska person who I hope will want to take this role. Other calls to justice that I see as recommendations include article 7.6, which states that health and wellness service providers must educate others about the historical and ongoing violence of colonialism, and 15.8, which calls for everyone to help hold the government accountable to these calls to justice, which speaks to my emphasis on action and activism. Others say that it is the government itself that needs to be destroyed to get justice for MMIWGT2S+ and their families. Therefore, I support calls to Indigenous sovereign governance and the unknowing of where I and other settlers will land when state governance is dismantled and held accountable for its violence. Alongside these recommendations, it is also vital that our actions within YFD also address and respond to the direct needs and wishes of the Indigenous families in Watson lake who have relatives who have been murdered or stolen, and who continue to face colonial violence.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This research process has led me to the following recommendations for further exploration:

- Collaborative research with other White Settler practitioners to articulate ethics in solidarity practices;

- Research with White settler youth participants to understand their perspectives on participation and my role as a White practitioner;
- Testing out how my Emerging Solidarity Practice for Justice-Doing works for other White settler researchers;
- How to create White settler solidarity groups and processes of accountability;
- How to divest from White supremacy in CYC without enacting settler moves to innocence or other harms;
- Probing the tension of White settler engagement with art-making centered on solidarity without co-opting or appropriating;
- Probing the intersection between neurodivergence and solidarity;
- Explore accounting for more intersections for White settler solidarity within the Emerging Solidarity Practice for Justice-Doing such as Blackness, critical disability, and mental health.

## **Conclusion**

There are no simple solutions or quick fixes when engaging with White settler solidarity (Curnow & Helferty, 2018). Solidarity is an “imperfect strategy” rife with ethical tensions (Curnow & Helferty, 2018, p. 155; Reynolds, 2013). Although I have answered my research question in some ways, I still have more questions than answers about my role as White settler in solidarity efforts. I have also engaged with tools to address these questions and tensions, not with the goal of necessarily finding neat and tidy solutions, but to remain unsettled, critical, and inhabit a space of possibilities. My goal is not to convince you that this pathway is the *best* way forward, but *one* way to navigate the messy waters of White settler solidarity. As White settlers, it is important to

focus on our own healing, community, and histories of domination and locate the problems within White supremacy, not the communities that are harmed by it. This is a document about beginnings, not endings! Through this research, I found a potential new beginning within myself, and a new relationship to my solidarity as White settler, one that is enriched by listening in an embodied way to not only what is happening around me but listening to myself and my own body. It is one way I attempt to shed my own deeply engrained indicators of White supremacy.

This research refuses the narrative that White supremacy, colonialism, settler colonialism are inevitable concepts (Simpson, 2017). White supremacy wants us to believe that the systemic violence it brings is unstoppable; it aims to steal our hope to make us believe that there is no point in fighting it. To echo the words of Vikki Reynolds (2020), I believe that as CYC practitioners, it is our responsibility to be “bringers of hope” (p. 255). Solidarity work counteracts the despair brought by White supremacy by resisting in a multitude of small and big ways. I hope readers will feel more hopeful to meet the challenges of changing the violent systems of our society that we must dismantle together. I know that this research has re-invigorated and reinvested me deeper into my own solidarity and desires for a better future. I leave you with the words of Vikki Reynolds (2012) and an invitation to join in on this critical work: “There are many paths to justice-doing, and I respect yours, as I outline mine.” (p. 19).

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## Appendix A : Participant Consent Form



**University  
of Victoria**

## Participant Consent Form

### *Ts'ídāne á' nezen: Youth for Dignity project*

You are invited to participate in a study entitled Exploring a Witnessing Framework for White Settler Solidarity and Practice that is being conducted by Julie Laliberte.

Julie Laliberte is a graduate student in the department of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by emailing: [julieannelaliberte@gmail.com](mailto:julieannelaliberte@gmail.com)

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Child and Youth Care. It is being conducted under the supervision of Sarah Wright Cardinal. You may contact my supervisor at [swcardinal@uvic.ca](mailto:swcardinal@uvic.ca).

This research is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

As you know, Watson Lake Secondary School (WLSS) is working with LAWS to run the Youth for Dignity (YFD) Program for students in Grades 8 to 12 on topics of safety, dignity, and gender-based and relationship violence.

You/Your child is involved in the *Ts'ídāne á' nezen: Youth for Dignity project*. This form provides information about what their participation in the research project would mean. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask YFD facilitator, Julie Laliberté.

The purpose of this research project is to explore a useful practice framework for White settlers, and how *witnessing* and art can be a part of that framework. The main part of this research will be focused on the researcher using an auto-ethnographic methodology. Your/your child's participation will be a small part of the research and involve sharing a short story or statement, further described below.

#### **What is involved**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include:

1. share a short story/statement about:
  - a. Your contribution to the collaborative art piece; and/or

- b. What resistance looks like to you; and/or
  - c. A witness statement you would like to share with MMIWGT2S (murdered or missing Indigenous women, girls, trans and two-spirit people).
2. review the story and check for accuracy/make any changes

This short story/statement will be included verbatim in Julie's final thesis as an addition. You/your child can choose whether or not to remain anonymous. You/your child can choose to share or not share. At any time, they can decide to no longer be a part of the project by telling the facilitators. It will not affect their relationship with anyone at the school or Program. Please note that if a youth shares an incident of abuse, we would need to report it to the authorities.

Video tapes / photos will be taken of you (your child) with your permission – SEE PERMISSION FOR VISUAL DATA BELOW. You/your child can choose whether or not they want photos included or not included in the research.

### **Risks**

While psychological and emotional risks are unlikely, there will be school-based and Elders to support youth as some of the conversations about MMIWGT2S and/or how they resist violence could be uncomfortable for youth.

Participants will be advised if they have or may have come into contact with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19. Information for participants will be stored in a separate file from research data in the event that follow up is needed.

### **Benefits**

The potential benefits of your/your child's participation in this research include:

- Have the opportunity to creatively share about your/your child's resistance
- Develop your/your child's own framework for practice and solidarity
- Contribute to a useful framework for solidarity
- Have your/your child's work in YFD be recognized in a formal academic way

### **Confidentiality**

You/your child can choose whether or not to have a story be included in the research, and if you wish to remain anonymous. You/your child will be asked to review the written story for accuracy and to make any changes before the research is done.

### **Dissemination of Results**

You/your child will be provided access to the final thesis document by Julie Laliberte. There will also be a shorter report created and shared before the research is done.

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**PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE**

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

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*Name of Participant*


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*Signature*


---

*Date*


---

**PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE**

I hereby give permission for (print Youth name) \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this research project.

Parent/Guardian Name

Parent/Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

Phone Number

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Visually Recorded Images/Data**

Participant or parent/guardian to provide initials, *only if you consent*:

- Photos may be taken of me [my child] for:      Analysis \_\_\_\_\_ Dissemination\*  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Videos may be taken of me [my child] for:      Analysis \_\_\_\_\_ Dissemination\*  
\_\_\_\_\_

\*Even if no names are used, you [or your child] may be recognizable if visual images are shown in the results.

WAIVING CONFIDENTIALITY- *PLEASE SELECT STATEMENT only if you consent:*

I consent to be identified by name / credited in the results of the study: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant to provide initials)

I consent to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant to provide initials)

*you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).*

## Appendix B: Accountability Form

Here is the link for the accountability form to provide any feedback, concerns, questions, etc. you may have on my thesis after reading it, or my actions. You can choose to be anonymous, or include your contact information if you'd like me to reach out and follow up with you. I got the idea for this form from Margeaux Feldman.

Feel free to scan the QR code below or follow this link:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1gcsoKYMv-RpJayo7Yej7TDy8-s9XWfDqWHNYOvCZjB8/edit>

