

Leadership Supports for Indigenous Staff with Lived Experience

by

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BSW, University of Calgary, 2014

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

Social work practice involves acknowledging the interconnection between the personal and professional. Organizations hiring Indigenous staff are responsible to recognize the lived experience that comes with being an Indigenous person. Critical reflections of who benefits in an employment relationship are important to address issues of tokenization and exploitation. The language of ‘lived experience’ is most commonly used in the social work field to imply that a professional has experienced trauma, hardship, and systemic violence similar to individuals receiving or accessing services. In the context of a helping role, ‘lived experience’ is better represented by ‘healing experience’ because it recognizes the responsibilities of leadership and staff in ensuring supports are healing-focused. Anti-oppressive, decolonizing, and Indigenist methods were used to speak with Indigenous staff who self-identified lived experience similar to the people who access services to learn how supervisors and organizational leadership can provide helpful support.

The findings contributed to a supervision model based in the buffalo teachings of sharing, reciprocity, and valuing each aspect of a person as the starting place for relationship and good work. Building on this knowledge, changing the language from lived experience to healing experience offers a shift in the philosophical approach to recruitment and supervision. Each conversation naturally aligned with a quadrant of the Medicine Wheel where tangible insights into practice are shared into the spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental aspects of the self in an employment context. This study accounts for the non-Indigenous researcher’s personal journey to this topic, the importance of developing and contributing to the success of Indigenous social workers,

and the ways organizations are responsible to their workforce beyond minimum legislated requirements.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iii
Acknowledgments	vii
Dedication	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Self-location.....	4
1.3 Terminology.....	9
Chapter 2: Research Question.....	15
Chapter 3: Literature Review	21
Chapter 4: Methodology	31
4.1 Introduction	31
4.2 Philosophy	33
4.3 Theoretical Framework	36
4.4 Strategy of Inquiry	38
4.5 Methods.....	42
Chapter 5: Truth Telling	49
Chapter 6: Ethics	52
Chapter 7: Analysis & Interpretation.....	55
Chapter 8: Data to Knowledge.....	57
8.1 Storytellers	57

8.2 Respect	58
8.3 Whooping Crane	63
8.4 Karen Bruno.....	70
8.5 Participant 1	82
8.6 Danya Blayone.....	88
8.7 Summary of Findings	99
Chapter 9: Reflections	102
Chapter 10: Knowledge Sharing	106
Chapter 11: Conclusion	109
Bibliography.....	110
Appendix A.....	120
Appendix B	121
Appendix C	123
Appendix D.....	126

Acknowledgments

To the land where I live in Treaty Six Territory, thank you for life and healing when my ancestors came as settlers and acted violently. They perpetrated colonial acts of genocide that caused spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical harm to Indigenous peoples and the land. I take responsibility for the exploitive facts of my history and the ways my current experience is now integrated through privilege and dominance.

As a settler, I also consider it a privilege to learn from and with Indigenous teachers who have shown me how to be in relationship. I am grateful for opportunities to critically reflect on how my social identity and day-to-day actions reinforce violence. I am also grateful to feel a sense of hope through relationships, contributing to collaborative processes that support Indigenous self-determination.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to anyone who may find it helpful. Anyone who knew they could do better and took steps to figure out what that looked like. I understand that can be difficult and you are not alone.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Who we are in our social location and lived experiences manifests in our social work encounters, with or without our awareness (Baskin, 2011, p. 30; Baskin, 2016b, p. 133). A simple example is to reflect on the frequency with which we hear social workers ascribe meaning to their work because of commonalities between themselves and people being supported. If we extrapolate the meaning each social worker ascribes to their role, add the variance in personal values, healing work, practice, and consider that each social worker is informed at any moment by a lifetime of both struggle and perseverance, it is unquestionable that our ability to distinguish between the personal and professional becomes blurred at best. This overlap, when cared for appropriately, is a strength of the practitioner because it allows a starting place for the relationship. It can be a point of connection and similarity rather than the performance of superimposed professional boundaries. With adequate supervision, social workers can discern between their own experience and the experience of others. This process can take time and dedication.

Recruiting and supporting Indigenous staff requires the supervisor to be diligent in their own practice. As workplaces open up to the professional role of peer supports in recovery work and the intentionality of hiring staff with lived experience, those who most closely identify with the majority of people requiring human service support would be Indigenous staff who have had involvement with various social systems (Adams, Paasse, & Clinch, 2011; Chartrand, 2019; Krieg, 2016; McCauley, Matheson, 2018; Shier, Graham, Fukuda, & Turner, 2015; Walsh, McMillan, Stewart, & Wheeler, 2018; Wildcat, 2015). In a comprehensive article reviewing eighty-six research publications on social

work supervision over a forty-year period, Kieran O-Donoghue and Ming-sum Tsui (2015) note that in cases where there are cross-cultural differences with the supervisory relationship, there is a need for the supervisor to improve their capacity to work effectively with the supervisee (O-Donoghue & Tsui, 2015).

Most publications in their review were focused on clinical supervision, work centred on involuntary services, and the necessary educational requirements of the supervisor to support the success of the supervisee (O-Donoghue & Tsui, 2015). This research is embedded in the context of non-profit community work where services are voluntary and supervision practices are varied and largely unchecked. In relation to the publication review by O-Donoghue and Tsui (2015), there is a gap between the function of supervision as a mechanism to better client outcomes and the breadth of published knowledge available as it relates to non-clinical supervisory practices. In the context of community and voluntary services, education requirements and the knowledge base of the supervisor can vary greatly, meaning so too can the supports provided. In conjunction with the same variance at a staffing level, there is a need for exploration into how non-clinical supervision can best benefit people who receive supports.

The role of lived experience in social work practice links to O-Donoghue and Tsui's (2015) review of the need for personal and professional advice in the cases of novice social workers. The ability for the supervisory relationship to be effective also relies on engaging with cultural differences in appropriate ways. For Indigenous social workers, personal experiences can offer insight into the realities of those accessing services, which means supports from a supervisory relationship may mirror supports provided in practice. Professionals are not only navigating the needs of others but must

care for the way their own similar experiences inform and arrive to social work encounters. These supports are most often framed as problematized individual self-care efforts (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012), however other forms, including a framework for supervision, should be offered by organizations and supervisory staff. Implementation and awareness of a relevant supervisory model demonstrates due diligence to the staff and supervisor relationship, expressing gratitude for the benefits received when employing Indigenous staff where personal experiences are used for organizational gain.

When considering how professional and personal realities are interconnected, we can become immobilized by all of the opportunities to identify meaning and areas for growth. In my experience, acknowledging that supervisory work in the context of lived experience can be overwhelming is an important part of navigating relationships successfully because it keeps me open to perspectives that are not my own. Being self-aware and continually exploring my own limitations and strengths enables me to work within my scope more effectively. Demonstrating security in my abilities while maintaining a curiosity that facilitates growth is one way I practice anti-oppressively. As a supervisor and employee with lived experience, I model how to explore the personal and through my relationships, education, and work experience, frame what I have lived into something that may be of benefit to other supervisors, staff, and people who access services.

Sharing experiences with people can be exciting, especially if we have grown in meaningful ways. An important part of the meaning-making process is to identify the difference between similarity and sameness. Lived experience can enable attuned supports because of parallel circumstances. Assuming that a parallel circumstance equals

sameness can cause harm because the person who requires support is considered completely knowable. For example, someone may be struggling with a new mental health diagnosis and the social worker has identified with the same diagnosis for the past ten years. Once the social worker learns of the diagnosis they begin making assumptions about treatment, the daily experience of the diagnosis, and the meaning-making process of this person. The social worker has determined that because of the same diagnosis the experience of all other factors related to the diagnosis are also the same. Dialogue regarding how to utilize similarity without assuming sameness can help workers stay in a helping role.

1.2 Self-Location

As a researcher in relation to this work, my own accountabilities are historical, land-based, relational, and structural. I am a non-Indigenous person with a settler history who has been privileged to learn the majority of my social work practice from Indigenous women, communities, and teachers, beginning with all of my social work practicums. As a student, I engaged in transformational healing work in the context of experientially learning Indigenist Research Methodologies from established social work researchers within an Indigenous institution. This taught me that gratitude is a lived expression that includes sharing what I have learned.

My family lineage consists of settlers from England, the Netherlands, Prussia, and Ukraine (Russia). My father's family is Russian Mennonite. Part of the Kleine Gemeinde migration, Mennonites initially sent scouts to Southern Manitoba where they settled in the late 1800s. Treaty 1 had already been signed, yet the government took more land and made legal exemptions to Mennonites so that they would emigrate and begin farming.

My ancestors believed in military exemption, strict religious and child-rearing practices, and ran private schools, functioning as primarily insular colonies. Mennonite heritage is not an ethnic identity, it is a Christian and religious group. These practices were threatened in Ukraine and to escape conscription into the Russian army, among other challenges, they left. My last name was formerly Friesen, changed generations ago from Von-Riesen. Steinbach, Manitoba is where most of my familial knowledge lives.

On my mother's side, our ancestors come from England and they settled in Wheatland, Manitoba. I am still searching for more knowledge of our history, however I do know my great grandparents ran the general store in town. My Grandfather was a highly regarded employee of the Canadian Pacific Railway and my mother and her family moved frequently to accommodate his employment. My grandmother raised 8 children and was known for her sharp wit. After moving around Manitoba and Ontario, my grandparents settled again in Rivers, MB where I also lived as a child for a short time.

My upbringing reflected the strictness from my father's Mennonite Evangelical history. I have two older brothers who experienced a more lenient parenting style because when my younger sister and I were small and they were nearly out of the home, he began pastoring churches across the prairies. We moved often multiple times per year and my sister and I were homeschooled. My Mother stayed home with us and we experienced abuse and disconnection, relying solely on each for support. At the age of sixteen, I graduated from high school and my Mother left the marriage, took my sister with her, and moved to Winnipeg, MB. Over time and through my healing work, I legally changed my last name to Perrett, my Mother's maiden name, to honor her resistance and my own journey.

When I reflect on the history of my family, I note a stronger connection to the Ukrainian and German roots of the Mennonite side of my family. This has been done through the food of my childhood, the way relationships with father's side were prioritized, and having access to more knowledge of his ancestral lineage. For me, this is another example of how patriarchal values and the violence I experienced as a child are pervasive in my personal narrative. How I connect culturally is a reflection of colonial narratives. For example, to keep myself safe I have distanced myself from the relationship with my Father. At the same time, my experience of family and connection as a child prioritized his experience, making my identity interconnected with the person who acted violently towards myself and the women in my family. Understanding the way colonization has affected my life allows me to have a better understanding of how my ancestors from Treaty 1 Territory were violent to First Nations and Métis people.

I use this complicated experience to inform my current relationships by grounding in places that honor connection while critiquing that which reinforces colonial values. My cultural connection and identity is never fixed because I am always learning new information and making sense of it contextually. For example, I am married to a man of Ukrainian ancestry from rural Alberta. In our relationship, I have had to address triggers from my past and, as a result, have been able to grow in the context of my marriage. Part of this growth has been exploring how patriarchal values play out in our heteronormative relationship. Together we talk about gender roles, our family histories, and determine together how to be de-colonial. In this example, I have the luck of being with someone who is also committed to personal growth. Personal learning is still available to us when vulnerability is not mutual.

Being in relationship with Indigenous peoples and the land has taught me the power that comes from knowing who you are and where you come from. I was born in Thunder Bay ON in the Robinson-Superior Treaty and have no memories of living there. After decades of constant relocation, I now live in *amiskwaciywâskahikanihk* (Edmonton, AB) in the Treaty Six Territory where this research was completed. This territory was taken from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples who were self-sustaining and in relationship with the land, so strong that they were able to offer help to settlers who would have died otherwise. *amiskwaciywâskahikanihk* (Edmonton, AB) was land that belonged to the Papaschase Band after the signing of Treaty Six. Their ancestors are buried here and the ancestors of many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit families have known this land and are the rightful caretakers.

My family did not teach me how to be responsible regarding Treaties, nor did they acknowledge the colonial and genocidal actions of our past and present involvement with Turtle Island and Indigenous peoples (Hiller, 2016). I am an uninvited visitor to the land where I live and have carried out this research, and I acknowledge the Indigenous peoples of both the territory where I reside and the larger community of diverse Indigenous nations and tribes who know what is best for the land and community. Through relationships, spiritual guiding forces, and personal choice, I have chosen a path to account for my privilege, place it in scope for review and repurposing, and most importantly, listen and learn from those around me.

I have a responsibility to know my history in order to have an increased awareness in the present, however, awareness is not enough. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) states, we must understand “the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is

deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices” (p. 32).

Because this research has been open to Indigenous frontline staff and those who have previously done frontline work, I will be drawing heavily on the work of experts in the field of Indigenous research methodology to inform my understanding of how to gather knowledge in a respectful, decolonial, and Indigenist way (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2011; Baskin, 2016b; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008; Wilson, 2013).

It was when participating in ceremony that I first experienced what it meant to be a whole person. Through the relationships I developed with Indigenous teachers in my life, I began a journey of understanding the depths of colonization in my own lived experience and, out of that, my commitment to being an ally for Indigenous peoples grew. The power imbalance inherent to these relationships will never be eliminated and the most important learning I have taken out of this healing is a call to action (Baskin, 2016b). My work is informed by using resources available to me to address colonial social work practices.

I carry many privileges being a white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, educated, and middle-class woman. Michelle Fine’s (1998) generative article about “working the hyphen” highlights “how we are in relation with the contexts we study” and that we are “all multiple in those relations” (p. 72). Appropriately addressing my privilege includes self-motivated education that does not place the responsibility of facilitation on those who are experiencing oppression. If someone tells a personal story I don’t fully understand as it relates to the enactment of the Indian Act, it is my responsibility to do research on my own time rather than ask intrusive questions to the person of how they are impacted by oppressive legislation. Listening and being comfortable with uncertainty is

part of addressing power because dominant thought patterns tell me everything is knowable and that I have the right to access any information by only asking a question. Following knowledge sharing protocols and being comfortable as an outsider to certain areas of knowledge is a practice of respectful relations.

I have been embedded in local relationships throughout this process. In their book chapter, Gray, Coates, and Hetherington (2008) point to a number of ways non-Indigenous social workers can avoid totalizing Indigenous families and colleagues while working in culturally appropriate ways. One suggestion is the use of grounding an approach “where the point of reference is the local context and cultural practices.” While the knowledge from written materials is vital to providing a theoretical frame, connection to community is equally important to ensure the theory is relevant to practice. My accountability to my history and present status as a white settler is present in this work and following Indigenous teachings, participating in ceremony, and engaging in relational feedback processes has guided and supported me to work in respectful and de-colonial ways.

1.3 Terminology

Language in the social service sector can often be oppressive and dehumanizing, deflecting responsibility and focusing on individual deficits without context (Coates & Wade, 2007). Working with people who have lived experience requires an openness to examining how we talk about the knowledge those experiences produced. This is a lifelong learning process because supervisors are constantly strategizing supports, navigating expectations from various stakeholders, and balancing working relationships.

Speaking openly and using language as an opportunity to connect can have a powerful impact on dignifying someone's lived experience (Coates & Wade, 2007).

In this research I use the term 'lived experience' to describe a singular or pervasive experience that is similar to people who access social services voluntarily or involuntarily. Working in a non-profit where funding is tied to political drivers can create tension between ethics and undue hardship. Discussing lived experiencing and framing it in terms of resistance, structural injustice, and dignity can be a powerful experience for staff and supervisors (Coates & Wade, 2007; Richardson & Wade, 2010). Translating relational insight into reporting documentation, human resource records, and performance plans is an opportunity to change the way multiple layers of the employee experience can work in a punitive or exploitive way. Depending on workplace culture, the same need to communicate relational insight can lead to intentional concealment to protect employment, reputation, and further exploitation. This can result in a 'take what you can get' approach that I have experienced whereby the staff and supervisor have a shared understanding to preserve their work by concealing it from other professionals.

The term Indigenous in this research is inclusive of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, as well as people who self-identify as Indigenous but may not know their ancestral history. Part of my learning working in an urban context is that some people recognize Indigenous ancestry, however do not have knowledge of specific generational and land-based connections. This can be a complicated experience and supporting people with identity questions is important in a working context.

Referring to Indigenous staff with lived experience has been shortened to 'staff' at various points throughout this research to encourage the reader to think critically about

the ways we acknowledge difference and how that has the potential to morph into tokenism. Constantly referencing ‘Indigenous’ staff can suggest a supervisor provide special treatment, obscuring the message that this work is holistic. Certain supports outlined here are distinct because the role of social work in Indigenous lives has a history of facilitating colonization that is still ongoing. There may be situations where some of the research is generalizable to non-Indigenous staff with lived experience and I have used language flexibly to invite the reader to naturally conclude that based on their own experiences and working context.

The National Association of Social Workers and the Association of Social Work Boards (2013) that govern Canada’s social work associations define supervision as “the relationship between the supervisor and supervisee in which the responsibility and accountability for the development of competence, demeanor, and ethical practice take place.” The outcome of supervision is to ensure “clients are protected” and “that clients receive competent and ethical services” (National Association of Social Workers, 2013). The NASW (2013) states there are three primary domains of supervision:

1. Administrative - synonymous with management, oriented towards agency policy, demands, and work assignments
2. Educational - focuses on staff development and helps the social worker become more self-aware, refining knowledge and skills related to assessments and interventions
3. Supportive - provides conditions that nurture the social worker’s wellbeing and is underscored by safety and trust, supporting the development of professional identity

These domains overlap and can be morphed into unhelpful versions, depending on the workplace and supervisor capacity.

Power dynamics are addressed differently in each work environment and supervision is workplace specific. Most workplaces have a code of ethics or set of values that guide practice, informing supervisory focus. Workplaces may also distinguish between managerial oversight and supervisors who are leads in practice. Some agencies may employ clinicians who require supervision based on the mandates of their professional association which may be provided externally to the workplace environment. Other workplaces may provide supervision only on a requested basis due to budgetary or time management constraints. In some contexts the supervisor may belong to a different profession. In clinical supervision where practitioners are self-employed, supervision can be more exploratory and caring, focused on the clinician's thoughts, feelings, and overall wellbeing.

When reflecting on the three domains of supervision, we see how varied workplace norms and constraints can contribute to highly successful and potentially damaging supervision experiences. In the non-profit sector, resources are typically limited and practice is informed by a deficit-based lens. This can contribute to supervisors focusing more on administrative duties, leaving out the educational and supportive aspects. In the private clinical sector, practitioners have increased autonomy and reduced power dynamics with employers or funders. This could make supervisors more focused on the supportive aspect while forgetting to question ethics and legal responsibilities associated with the administration and educational aspects.

All of these variables can impact the supervisor and supervisee's predisposition to the function of supervision. Establishing clear expectations and boundaries about the role of supervision is important because it provides the opportunity for relational informed consent. For example, say an employee is struggling with their mental health due to a physical illness and they are still on probation. If they ask for exceptions or accommodations, they are more vulnerable to termination. If the supervisor is seeing the staff underperform, they may terminate anyway without proper understanding. Having a new relationship with a supervisor can be intimidating and managerial power dynamics contribute to feelings of unsafety. Providing context to new employees and reinforcing expectations helps build an environment of trust. In cases where the manager may not be enough, often informal supervisory relationships can help employees grow in their role without the worry of over-exposing personal information at work.

In this research, I have used the terms supervisor and employer interchangeably because the work environment referred to by storytellers incorporates both roles. In the field of social work the role of a supervisor has a weighted responsibility attached. It can include practice development, education, personal support, and peer support. Employer is a legal term and the significance of using it here is that the storytellers work in a context where their supervisor holds both a legal responsibility and a supervisory one. There are also opportunities for people who may identify as only employers to begin seeing themselves in a more relational capacity after reading this work.

Throughout, I use terminology that equates all Indigenous staff working in a professional helping role with a social worker title. Employers will often have lived experience equivalencies to education requirements, meaning external accredited

professional responsibilities do not apply. This perspective does not account for the relational, spiritual, and land-based responsibilities that supersede accrediting standards. In many ways there are increased responsibilities from an Indigenous worldview because of connection to community, kinship, teachers, spirit, land, and self (Baskin, 2011; Baskin, 2016b). Lived experience is not mutually exclusive from someone's education. The interplay between personal experience, education, and professional designation is not explored here in detail. This research uses the term social worker to include anyone working in a helping role.

Chapter 2: Research Question

My experience supervising Indigenous staff has been the most significant influence in my arrival to this research. Partially due to many unearned privileges I became a supervisor and then manager of non-profit programs quite early in my career. Because of mentorship I received from Elders and a First Nations University, I was positioned to practice what I had learned through the lens of allyship and solidarity (Reynolds, 2019). What became apparent quite quickly, and has recently been published by Susan Burke (2018), was supporting Indigenous staff required an approach necessitating a dialogue about racism and discrimination in the workplace. Included in this discussion is a critique of the Indian Act and the fight for land rights. Treating Indigenous people as individuals in a workplace is another way of imposing power and control by not acknowledging members of sovereign, independent nations.

As a supervisor, I noticed that the recruitment process was standardized to disadvantage candidates with lived experience. Rigid interview processes, judgements about personal experience, and privileging education requirements all made offering a position to a candidate a challenge to human resource strategies. Upon being successful in the interview, staff were told to be forthcoming with deeply personal experiences involving mandatory background checks. The treatment of candidates could be shaming and sensationalizing. Focusing on a person's time of being unwell and/or requiring critical personal support would begin the relationship with the employer with a lack of trust and decreased expectation of overall success in the role. I also witnessed a subsequent hesitancy in bringing forward the expertise, gifts, and knowledge that the staffs' experiences offered.

The practice I witnessed when staff were able to integrate lived experience was more effective than staff who relied solely on education. Having worked in voluntary and involuntary programs, I found this to be true in both. The prioritization of relationship over policy was a primarily successful strategy I witnessed. One in which I would often collaborate with staff. This involved a discussion about the knowledge base for disregarding the policy and a shared understanding of the desired outcome. Thinking ahead to any potential consequences and evaluating them for harm and opportunity for change was part of my process in determining next steps. I frame this strategy as part of the ethics Indigenous social workers possess regarding relationships and webs of accountability beyond workplace rules (Baskin, 2011; Baskin, 2016b). My role in supporting this knowledge was to navigate the risk management at an institutional level and engage in reflective conversations with the staff.

Some people working in a helping role transfer their personal experiences onto people accessing supports by engaging in unprofessional or conflictual behaviors. I experienced this with someone who had a particular point of view regarding family composition. He would assert this view verbally with colleagues and people accessing supports. People found his view troubling because it polarized a complicated issue and was not in alignment with their experiences. The more people disagreed with him, the more assertive he became. In supervision we discussed the possibility of maintaining the view without actively trying to convince others of its validity. I pointed to examples of times when his expression of the views had been inappropriate in a work environment. His inability to shift focus from his conviction to the needs of the people he worked with resulted in job loss.

The complexity of these dynamics can lead to strained relationships and cause individuals accessing services to be particularly vulnerable in addition to the reason(s) they are already involved. As a supervisor, my role was to structure safety for people accessing services and ensure the quality of service was maintained. Part of how I did this was by supporting staff to engage in dialogue and personal growth in the context of their role, always trying to centre the people we serve (Reynolds, 2019). There were times where these approaches led to successful outcomes. The staff became engaged in their work, were able to think creatively about approaches, and were able to approach their supervisor or colleagues when they needed support. In some situations staff struggled with meeting role requirements, establishing boundaries with people accessing supports, and implementing feedback.

Navigating this learning was challenging and I made many mistakes. I experienced a lack of training and workplace dialogue around what supports staff may require in order to work well. My social work education did not address supervision in the curriculum and workplaces did not offer training specifically related to supporting Indigenous staff with lived experience. I found it would have been helpful to have a practice model that offered insight into the supervisory relationship. This could have normalized the concept of lived experience in the workplace, creating an environment of support and solidarity among all employees.

I learned a lot from the people I worked with. I took time to integrate these teachings. I considered their requests for more accessible, practice research. This prompted me to articulate my research question as follows: *What supervision practices*

best support Indigenous social workers with lived experience? The research outcomes led to a supervision model based on supporting worker leadership, based on an Indigenist, decolonizing approach. As well, this model incorporated the ethics of anti-oppressive practice, such as listening to someone's experience without offering advice. This study followed an Indigenist process as it was taught to me, and was overseen by Indigenous leaders in the local and academic community. This was an important part of honoring my teachers and the path that led me to this place.

The teachings for this research came from relationships in the local community. I also wanted the findings to connect to other initiatives such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action (TRC, 2015). Connecting what is happening locally to larger initiatives highlights how the helping professions can be more social justice oriented. One example of this is the overarching need for social workers and decision-makers to be educated about the history and impacts of Residential Schools. In social work, emphasis regarding who is most impacted by Residential Schools and colonial harms is often placed on people accessing services. However, as the TRC Calls to Action (2015) highlight, there needs to be a dialogue in the professional community. I suggest that the supervisory relationship is a critical part of this discussion in the context of supporting Indigenous staff with lived experience.

My intention with this research was to provide strength-based perspectives on lived experience supervision that are grounded in Indigenous knowledge as I have been taught. The purpose is to benefit people who are accessing services in voluntary or involuntary ways. I believe that all services are involuntary to a degree because often circumstances are critical and involve meeting basic needs. A need that is life-threatening

or puts someone in the position of requesting to have a human right upheld should compel a professional response that is immediate and dignifying. The reason for referring to 'clients' as 'people accessing services' is to identify the person first. In my local context, referring to people as clients is not acceptable so I have also implemented that practice here.

There are many contexts where the needs of people who receive supports are not being met, such as families forced to engage with child welfare. This research is not an assessment of services being provided, though the type of work social workers are practicing does have influence on the supervisory relationship. Many of the resources discussed in the literature review speak to child welfare work environments and the stress experienced. The storytellers who have participated in this research are all aware of the child welfare system and there are some references to it, though the work environment at the time of this research was a voluntary housing program.

Another intention of this research is to draw attention to Indigenous and settler relations in a staffing context. I have been a settler supervisor in relationship with Indigenous staff. Addressing this power imbalance is part of my practice yet it is not in my job description. For leaders, much of the relational work required to support staff with lived experience goes beyond the employment contract and is a way of life (Burke, 2018). This is partly anti-oppressive "living" because the commitment to working in this way requires personal contributions (Thomas & Green, 2007). One way I practice this is by having constant communication with people regarding all aspects of the role. This includes asking input on decisions, talking through upcoming changes, and providing as

much access as possible to my reasoning. I try to be accessible, collaborative, and consistent so people are included and there are no surprises.

Leadership hiring Indigenous social workers with lived experience has a responsibility to provide technical training. Balance between task-based aspects of the role and process-oriented development can contribute to success because people have strengths in different areas (Burke, 2018). Lived experience is different for everyone. Hiring someone who has been a single parent may mean they are excellent at case management and technical skill, however they may be challenged by something that requires ‘hanging around.’ Alternatively, someone who is very spiritually attuned may require support in time management and how to complete administrative tasks. Supporting a natural exploration of skill and strength at the outset builds a relationship based on respect and value. Offering opportunities for training and development demonstrates care for the growth and long-term success of that person.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

I searched the literature to explore how Indigenous social workers are supported by their agencies and supervisors in bringing their experiences into their work. I looked specifically for material that approached the conversation from a holistic or Indigenous perspective. While searching, I remained open to the geographical locations of the authors as a way of acknowledging that we all contribute to our collective knowledge. Prior research regarding the experiences of Indigenous staff working in social services broadly falls into two categories:

1. Experiences of Indigenous workers
2. Indigenous supervision practices

These categories have more overlap than distinction so they will be reviewed using an integrated approach.

A study exploring how to support Indigenous families moving to Edmonton, AB, notes several key “competencies” that social workers should have to increase their effectiveness (Templeton & Durksen, 2014). These skills were identified by the researchers after reviewing case notes from community support workers who were working with the families. They include: cultural competency, knowledge and creative use of local-level programs and services, keen ability to maintain contact with families, advocacy and mediation skills, communication and trustworthiness, non-judgment, and consistency and responsiveness to family needs (Templeton & Durksen, 2014). Overall, these qualities were summarized by the authors as “relational” and “reflective” (Templeton & Durksen, 2014). They emphasized how families in the study benefitted “from working with a care worker who shares commonalities” and can create safety

while offering support in navigating systems (Templeton & Durksen, 2014). This points to the relationship between sharing commonalities through lived experience and the importance of establishing safety.

In her article entitled “Supporting Indigenous Social Workers in Front-Line Practice,” Susan Burke’s (2018) research states her observance of the increase in frontline Indigenous staff. Required supports were shared in nine themes:

1. Knowledgeable leadership that supports autonomy
2. Flexibility in practice
3. Policy that fits both Indigenous and Western paradigms
4. Relationships with other supportive social workers
5. Support to navigate overlap between the personal and the professional
6. Set standards/experienced co-workers
7. Equitable workplace resources
8. Respect regarding Indigenous identity
9. Supports to maintain wellness

These themes came out of conversations with child welfare workers in Northern BC where the majority of social workers have historically been non-Indigenous (2018). This study builds on Burke et al.’s (2016) previous work regarding the role of cognitive dissonance in the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous child welfare staff facilitating transracial adoptions. Cognitive dissonance is “a state of tension occurring when a person holds two psychologically inconsistent cognitions” (Burke et al., 2016). In this study social workers share their experiences with working in a value-based profession and having to practice in ways incongruent with their values (Burke et al.,

2016). Cognitive dissonance creates stress to which the natural response is to reduce the disparity between the personal value and workplace stressor (Burke et al., 2016). If left unchanged at a structural level, the worker finds themselves changing personal values to close the gap and reduce tension (Burke et al., 2016). Burke et al. (2016) identified cognitive dissonance in the following areas:

1. Competing needs – Indigenous children deserve permanency vs. adoptive parents who do not provide cultural supports
2. Personal values versus systemic values – Indigenous value of cyclical processes vs. government that operates linearly
3. Cultural connection and identity – culture is a lived experience vs. documented cultural plans
4. Personal roles – personal role in perpetuating colonization vs. social work role of providing children permanent homes

Burke (2018) and Burke et al. (2016) identify how the experience of an Indigenous social worker can be personally challenging. There is pressure to perform the role effectively and an internal struggle in managing the feelings and psychological stressors that develop. A social worker in Burke (2018) “described how her work brought up previous life experiences and she had to work through them while in the workplace.” Asking or expecting Indigenous social workers to deny aspects of identity is colonization. It is not honoring to teachings of interconnectedness and can have serious impacts on someone’s wellbeing.

Burke et al. (2016) explored the ways cognitive dissonance affect social workers. The impacts were described using the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual quadrants

of the Medicine Wheel (Burke et al., 2016). Included in each quadrant was primarily negative responses, however numbers 6, 9, and 10 are notably positive. Burke et al. (2016) followed the responses to cognitive dissonance as they went through the Medicine Wheel, including positive and negative responses together. Crying was named as a common response because it acted as a messenger, arriving when workers thought they had mastered the dissonance (Burke et al., 2016). Below is the full list of impacts:

1. Sleeplessness
2. Use of medication and/or self-medication
3. Seeing the world negatively
4. Fantasies of getting a different job
5. Self-identified trauma from remaining in the role
6. Crying
7. Disassociation
8. Growing up too quickly – experiencing the world differently from most people
9. Spiritual growth
10. Increased openness and acceptance of current state

Ways of reconciling the dissonance included:

1. Changing the behavior – getting a new job, being creative in the role
2. Changing the cognition – taking on a new perspective
3. Adding a new cognition – focusing on successful outcomes and being hopeful

Burke (2018) describes supervisory practices that can be offered as a response to the impacts of cognitive dissonance explored by Burke et al. (2015). The social workers in

Burke et al. (2015) took responsibility for their cognitive dissonance when additional relief and support at a supervisory and structural level could be more sustainable.

Bringing personal experience into practice is supported largely by experiential learning. We are better able to learn through experience and therefore offer the knowledge gained from those experiences to the people we work with (Flynn, 1997; Moon, 2006; Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, & Coulthard, 2014). This is also reflected in literature that discusses Indigenous teachings about reciprocity and giving back. As we gain knowledge through experience, we also have a responsibility to offer that knowledge back to the community (Baskin, 2011; Baskin, 2016b; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Reciprocity and experiential learning, while supporting the philosophical approach of the research, do not fully capture the responsibilities of leadership in supporting their staff. Experiential learning provides opportunities to see things differently and the implementation is the responsibility of the learner as they reflect and make connections to personal practice.

The majority of research regarding the experiences of Indigenous social workers originates in New Zealand and Australia. There were considerable overlaps in the realities of what it is like to work specifically with Indigenous communities as Indigenous social workers (Bennett, Zubrzycki, & Bacon, 2011; Boulton, Gifford, & Potaka-Osborne, 2009; Brown & Fraehlich, 2011; Brown & Fraehlich, 2014; Carrière & Peacock, 2015; Peacock, 2009; Reid, 2005; Roche et al., 2013; Whiteside, Tsey, McCalman, Cadet-James, & Wilson, 2006). Because of these similarities, I have categorized the experiential overlaps from these publications into the following themes:

1. Importance of culturally safety and supportive working environments

2. Conflicting expectations between community and funders
3. Importance of relevant training and professional opportunities
4. Complexities of being personally connected to people accessing services and maintaining healthy boundaries
5. Importance of addressing structural issues
6. Importance of maintaining personal wellness

In their community work involving on-reserve child welfare, Carolyn Peacock (2009; 2015) and Jeannine Carrière (2015) personally address each of these experiences. They offer both theoretical and personal models of practice for Indigenous social workers working within their home communities (Carrière & Peacock, 2015; Peacock, 2009). The authors have experiences local to the Edmonton region and the chapters include lived experience (Carrière & Peacock, 2015; Peacock, 2009).

The authors discuss the interconnectedness of working in the community where they live (Carrière & Peacock, 2015; Peacock, 2009). Part of this connection includes an ongoing lived experience that may not always be accounted for in practice models. This is because “practitioners who live and work in their communities of origin described opportunities for supportive informal intervention outside the office, along with the possibility of bringing their lifelong knowledge of the persons in question to the interaction” (Peacock, 2009). Indigenous communities are close-knit and therefore lived experience is understood to pre-exist for most service providers and users (Reid, 2005). This may result in the normalization of dealing with the realities of lived experience as opposed to singling it out as a unique practice phenomenon. In an urban setting,

Indigenous social workers may be less likely to have an intimate historical and familial working knowledge of people accessing services.

Research of Indigenous supervision practices discusses the shared experiences of systemic oppression, racism, marginalization, and stories of resistance (Bennett, Zubrzycki, & Bacon, 2011; Boulton, Gifford, & Potaka-Osborne, 2009; Brown & Fraehlich, 2011; Brown & Fraehlich, 2014; Carrière & Peacock, 2015; Peacock, 2009; Reid, 2005; Roche et al., 2013; Whiteside, Tsey, McCalman, Cadet-James, & Wilson, 2006). These experiences are discussed by Nelson, Bennett-Levy, Wilson, Ryan, Rotumah, Budden, Beale, & Stirling (2015), who conceptualize them as a “blur.” The “blur” is a term representing the reality of many Australian Indigenous social workers where their colleagues and people accessing services can be community members, friends, and family. Having pre-existing relationships means there is always a risk of breaching confidentiality and workers take on a heightened sense of vigilance in their work (Nelson et al., 2015). The workforce is often underqualified and undertrained which means the impacts of the work are often greater, leading to higher rates of burnout and a lack of workforce sustainability (Nelson et al., 2015). As a result, balance between the workers’ responsibilities to the community and profession can become difficult to navigate, taking a toll on personal wellbeing (Nelson et al., 2015). Nelson et al. (2015) note themes among the social workers’ experiences:

1. Need for safety/trust/confidence in supervisor
2. Supervision needed for personal and professional issues (boundaries)
3. Structured approach to supervision
4. Inadequacy of current supervision models

5. Supervisor retention a challenge
6. Supervisors need a working knowledge of how local Indigenous communities function

For Indigenous social workers, the everyday lived experiences compounded by the “blur” of working in the social work field, tasks the supervisor with increased responsibility (Nelson et al., 2015). In many cases, the supervisor may be experiencing the same “blur” themselves (Nelson et al., 2015). Navigating role responsibilities when both social worker and supervisor are experiencing the “blur” can add stress to an already challenging work environment (Nelson et al., 2015).

Natalie Scerra (2012) conducted a literature review with an Australian agency that recognized the need to support Indigenous staff through culturally appropriate supervisory practices. Through the review, Scerra (2012) problematizes two aspects of current supervision practices. First, is the use of the term “supervision” and the colonial implications that arise when discussing how to supervise Indigenous staff (Scerra, 2012). Not confined by social work supervision sources, Scerra (2012) states that across disciplines in the helping sector, “supervision” has been “an instrument of compliance” (p. 78). In cases where people with lived experience have no reference for the term, it could carry other connotations akin to micromanagement or disciplinary action.

Second, the terms “cultural supervision” and “cultural safety” become problematic considering the intersections of race and class as they relate to the worker-supervisor relationship (Scerra, 2012). The term “cultural supervision” also implies that appropriate default supervision practices are non-cultural, reinforcing the notion that Western approaches are culture-neutral (Scerra, 2012). Eruera in Scerra (2012) describes

supervision from a Māori perspective as an “agreed supervision relationship by Māori for Māori with the purpose of enabling the supervisee to achieve safe and accountable professional practice, cultural development and self-actualisation according to the philosophy, principles and practices derived from a Māori worldview” (p.80). This view opens up the supervisory relationship to include teachers who have shared experiences, identities, and worldviews.

Scerra (2012) identified peer supervision, narrative supervision (using stories), self-evaluation (videotapes), and external supervision as being particularly useful.

Additional points of consideration were:

1. The creation of reflective space that is relevant and meaningful
2. Supporting all staff to build culturally inclusive supervision environments
3. Adapting the content and approaches of supervisions to meet different professional and cultural needs

Through Scerra’s (2012) critique and exploration of supportive practices, a clear theme that ran through the review was that “cultural supervision needs to be considered as part of the clinical supervision process rather than as an additional component” (p. 84).

Supervision provided in a culturally appropriate way can be normalized rather than sensationalized as something unusual.

Two authors specifically address the role of non-Indigenous and settler supervisors in both therapeutic and child welfare contexts. Vikki Reynolds (2010) does considerable work in the area of clinical supervision practices. She has developed the concept of supervision solidarity. Six key principles inform this practice:

1. Centring ethics

2. Doing solidarity
3. Addressing power
4. Fostering collective sustainability
5. Critically engaging with language
6. Structuring safety

Based on Reynolds (2007; 2019) there is evidence that supervisors and practitioners require support for themselves because working in contexts where we cannot practice our ethics is challenging (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012). Reynolds (2007) also recognizes the importance of always acknowledging the role of power.

Christopher Walmsley (2009) identifies considerations for non-Indigenous social workers working with Indigenous families in child welfare. They include:

1. Understanding Indigenous people's history
2. Ongoing learning
3. Knowing your own culture
4. Power in child protection

What overlaps between Reynolds (2007) and Walmsley (2009) is a message about personal responsibility. This begins with the self and a recognition of context, history, and privilege. Once the self has been explored there is an environmental inventory that looks at how language, institutional contexts, and connection/disconnection have shaped our world. Addressing these considerations enables our learning and strong relational work.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

It was important for me to use methodologies that reflected my own lived experience. Learning Indigenous approaches to knowledge sharing and actively practicing allyship led me to three theories. The first is anti-oppressive theory because it addresses power and privilege in a way that is self-reflective. Pursuing this research topic has been challenging and learning about the ways I perceive oppression has been important. For example, one storyteller has chosen to remain anonymous and has chosen a name that is non-relational, yet we have a relationship. I perceived that to mean that there was a relational fracture between us and that I was acting oppressively. We spoke on more than one occasion and I learned that my eagerness to take responsibility for her chosen name was preventing me from understanding her true reason. The reason she provided was that she felt vulnerable participating in research at all and that she found our relationship a helpful factor that kept her consent intact.

Decolonizing theory is the second guide because colonization as a process is a specific form of oppression. Recognizing colonization on a personal level has been an important part of my healing. Understanding the role of colonization in relation to who I am as a settler and Treaty person is a formalized relationship (Hiller, 2016). Recognizing it uniquely orientates the research process to ancestral relationships and the land. As a supervisor, part of my practice is to listen to ways colonization affects the daily experiences of Indigenous staff. Listening involves being a witness to the violence and allowing myself to be affected without soliciting help from the person I am with. I acknowledge the reality and discern for myself if I have any actions to take away from the experience.

Utilizing an Indigenist approach was important to respect and follow local Indigenous knowledge sharing protocols (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Rigney, 1999). Asking Indigenous staff to share their experiences for research purposes can be colonizing as it has been so often (Carlson, 2016; Fortier, 2017; Hart, 2010; Hart, Straka, Rowe, 2017; Kovach, 2009; Rigney, 1999; Simpson, 2004; Simpson, 2016; Smith, 1999; Smith, 2005; Smith, 2012; Thomas, & Green, 2007; Walters et al, 2009; Wilson, 2008; Wilson, 2013). Proceeding with this research was done in relationship with Indigenous teachers, most of whom have been doing this work longer than myself. I needed to honor their experience, knowledge, and support of this work by following Indigenous methods.

Wilson (2007; 2013) describes an Indigenist paradigm as an approach that can be used by anyone who chooses to follow its teachings. Using Indigenist teachings distinguishes a set of values and practices from Indigenous identity and ancestry that does not belong to me. Indigenist research is informed and guided by an Indigenous worldview that scholars must “continually refine” to ensure that research conducted in community “is of the highest standard” (Wilson, 2007). As a settler researcher, this has been a challenge because my culture functions with a different value base. Individualism, exploitation, efficiency, and only doing things that feel good are some of the differences that I had to continually address. Part of my support was following advice from an Elder, reflecting on Indigenous teachings that have been shared with me, implementing feedback, collaborating on decision-making, and engaging with Indigenist/Indigenous readings.

To fully describe and explore my use of an Indigenist methodology, I will continue the methods section by following an outline Shawn Wilson (2013) identifies as integral to an Indigenist approach. The subheadings are:

1. Philosophy – guiding beliefs
2. Theoretical framework – actionable model of how to research
3. Strategy of inquiry – working model research process
4. Methods – description of actions
5. Data to knowledge - conclusions

As a settler researcher this helps me remain accountable to the elements of an Indigenist process. It also creates a framework to provide clarity and share the work that's been done in this study.

4.2 Philosophy

Interconnectedness is central to an Indigenous worldview (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2011; Baskin 2016b; Carriere & Richardson, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Makokis, 2001; Thomas & Green, 2007; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Connection is relationship and there are responsibilities that accompany relational engagement (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2011; Baskin 2016b; Carriere & Richardson, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Makokis, 2001; Thomas & Green, 2007; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). This is often referred to as relational accountability and describes the ways in which we interact with, and approach, our relationships (Wilson, 2008). One way I practice this is by being mindful of the words I write. Being relationally accountable means that even though I may be writing an email to someone about a sensitive matter, I aim to write it in a way that if anyone read it, I could demonstrate how what I wrote is aligned with my values. That alignment

demonstrates relational accountability because I am mindful of multiple relationships while working on something in the context of only one.

Wilson (2008) teaches that we do not *have* relationships, rather we *are* our relationships. Understanding the importance of connection begins with the self and extends into the past, future, spiritual, and natural realms. Having awareness of this teaching was important to being a researcher because it reminded me of the responsibility that people carry and how it is my role to ensure that storytellers have every opportunity to participate in that way. Sharing in a pipe ceremony at the outset of the research was an example of how we invited ancestors and spirits to guide and support this process, respecting their wisdom.

To respectfully frame the storytellers' knowledge, I followed the philosophy of the Medicine Wheel teachings described below. The Medicine Wheel is a four-dimensional model that has many representations and meanings (Absolon, 2010; Baskin, 2011; Baskin, 2016b; Richardson, 2006; Thomas & Green, 2007; Makokis, 2001). In this research, the Medicine Wheel is used to represent the spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental aspects of a person. The aim of acknowledging and incorporating each area is to maintain balance (Makokis, 2001). This practice was important to me because of the tendency for settler methodologies to focus on singularity. Indigenist approaches value balance and I wanted to honor the storytellers by framing their knowledge in a respectful way.

According to Baskin (2011), in order to “return to a place of balance, since all four aspects of this individual are affected, all four aspects must be engaged in a process of returning to balance” (p. 109). Pursuing balance is a lifelong process and the Medicine

Wheel supports us in discovering what areas need our focus. In addition to supporting balance, spirituality is the core of social justice and healing, a perspective on balance that extends beyond the individual and into community and system level experiences (Baskin, 2016a). Baskin (2016a) states that “each of us has a responsibility to use our spirituality in creating a better world” (p. 55). This call turns our philosophy into action and keeps us practically accountable to both the inward journey and outward demonstration of our values. In order to approach this research from a balanced place, the Medicine Wheel serves as both a philosophy and a framework.

Researching how we bring past experiences into our work requires a foundation inherently spiritual because what we bring into our work is not only reflective of our conscious understandings. I speak of my settler ancestors and am here working because of them. I share a spiritual connection with them and I derive action from their choices. I also reflect on the spiritual aspect of the Treaties. The circumstances surrounding Treaty Six agreements were not ethical and Métis and Inuit peoples specifically were excluded. Knowing the spiritual connection to land and learning about my history, I have a Treaty-based responsibility to acknowledge spirituality.

Religion has also been a mechanism to conceal, and commit, colonial spiritual violence. Thomas and Green (2007) align the spiritual quadrant of the Medicine Wheel with the impacts of colonization and historical analysis. For example, the Doctrine of Discovery was an extension of formalized statements made by the Pope to justify the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from their land, linking religious justification to colonization (Assembly of First Nations, 2018). The significance of spiritual interconnection and relational accountability in Indigenous worldviews was violated by

settlers. This linkage means there is a spiritual foundation to practicing decolonizing and anti-oppressive theory.

4.3 Theoretical Framework

I have a responsibility to utilize theoretical frameworks that demonstrate a critical and reflexive response to my settler context. Working within an Indigenous framework, Thomas and Green (2007) share that anti-oppressive practice is necessarily complicated and uncomfortable, must include an analysis of power, and forces us to critically examine how we know what we know by connecting our subjective lived experiences. Part of what connects me to this work is not only reciprocity with my teachers, but also my own lived experience.

Through social work education I engaged in healing work that included learning about my history in relation to Indigenous knowledge. I developed meaningful relationships with people who generously shared their experiences with me. I was also challenged to understand my place in the world from a personal lens that became interconnected with a social lens. Making meaning of my difficult childhood allowed me to appreciate and see more clearly how Indigenous people also make meaning of hardship.

The relationships I developed were also opportunities for me to address my privilege and the role colonization plays in my life. Doing this work in relationship, I learned to connect what I know to who I am. This interconnection has been the starting place of my practice (Thomas & Green, 2007). As Thomas & Green (2007) state, this is “anti-oppressive living” and is an aim for all of us (p. 96). In my own journey there are not achieved levels of progression insomuch as I experience a strengthening of practices

that contribute to wellbeing and good relations. I work towards balancing areas of my life so that I can be an effective support to the people around me.

Potts and Brown (2015) state that “a commitment to anti-oppressive research means committing to social justice and taking an active role in that change” (p. 17). Through my work as a supervisor and a supervisee, I have seen the way supervision practices can be destructive to people with lived experience. Advocacy and education are part of the work I do to try and improve that experience. For example, a colleague of mine is an Indigenous woman who is well respected in the community. Her family was experiencing involvement with child welfare and she asked me to be a support by co-writing a letter to decision-makers in the government. Because of my knowledge of the child welfare system, I was able to offer my writing skills and knowledge of the way they violated legislation to support her and her family’s needs. My colleague had family responsibilities outside of working hours, so we wrote the letter during work time. My supervisor at the time requested justification and I explained it by taking an anti-oppressive and decolonizing approach.

Recognizing and articulating an awareness of the impacts colonial processes have on the lives of Indigenous peoples is essential to an anti-oppressive approach (Thomas & Green, 2007). We often have an intuitive sense of injustice, however being able to share the information effectively is important to affecting change beyond ourselves. Additionally, the way forward must center traditional teachings in order to contribute to decolonial processes and a re-balancing of power structures (Thomas & Green, 2007). Bringing forward Indigenous knowledge and giving voice to Indigenous frontline workers who work in Eurocentric agencies are acts of social justice and can be

decolonizing. De-colonization theory fits with anti-oppressive theory and the two work together to create space for an Indigenist philosophy in this work.

Moving from a colonial practice to an Indigenist approach requires a middle step. Anti-oppressive practice provides us opportunities to “deconstruct colonial practices” (Thomas & Green, 2007) while decolonizing theory acts to “give power back to the participant and participant’s community” (Kovach, 2009). After we have dismantled the colonial structures that are known, there is space to develop a local, Indigenous approach to the research. Using decolonizing theory allows me to remain conscious of the history that research has played in Indigenous communities (Smith, 1999). It also supports the meaning making process by framing the stories in a way that is critical of colonial practices and, at the same time, honors the knowledge that comes forward as workers share their experiences (Smith, 2005).

4.4 Strategy of Inquiry

From the outset, I intended this research to be collaborative with an inner-city community agency. In the earliest stages, I was employed by an Indigenous agency and agreed to work together. When I left that agency for another, the plan was to remain involved through the research. After a relational breakdown, the new Western organization offered for me to continue the research with them. The majority of the research was completed in this context. I made effort to amend the original relational breakdown, however at the time it was not a path available to me. I have since had a positive public connection with one of the leaders at the Indigenous agency.

The purpose of partnering with an agency was to build on pre-existing relationships and give back to the community that would be participating in the research

because immediate supervisory relationships were informing the work. This aligned with anti-oppressive research practices by including a reciprocal process where the knowledge shared could become embedded into daily practice. It could also balance my power as a researcher by sharing the research process with an established body who could benefit directly from the work. Once the storytellers had shared their knowledge, it became apparent that to honor the knowledge that was shared, the work needed to become independent of any organizational affiliation.

My experiences using Indigenist research methods come from work with a local Indigenous institution Blue Quills First Nations University and my relationship with Elder Dr. Leona Makokis. The teachings I received were that in order to do this work I would have to begin in ceremony. Starting this way is both my method of asking permission to do the work on Indigenous land, with Indigenous peoples, using Indigenist methodologies, and for guidance throughout the process. This is the starting place in both the seen and unseen worlds that represents my statement of intent. In academia I write a proposal where I control the visibility of my intention. In an Indigenist approach I share my intention to listening people and spirits and acknowledge responsibility in a relational context (Wilson, 2008).

Part of my commitment to an Indigenist approach was to continue participation in ceremony when appropriate and to continue my own learning, acknowledging that Indigenous processes invite transformation. This meant that in addition to being an employee and a student, I was also pursuing personal and professional growth in areas directly related to the research topic. Because of the direct overlap of the topic and my

role as a supervisor of Indigenous staff with lived experience, these opportunities came naturally.

While inspired by supervisory experiences, my initial intent was to avoid speaking with people I directly had an employee/employer relationship with at the agency. This is my first time being a primary researcher and it seemed appropriate to establish that boundary to avoid the perception and reality of overwhelming power imbalances within a Eurocentric agency. Once the recruitment phase began, months went by with no interest from a roughly 300 person staff compliment – though there was a low known number of staff who self-identified as Indigenous.

After months of no interest, Indigenous staff who I had established relationships with, and whom I supervised both directly and indirectly, began approaching me asking how to participate in the research. They challenged my research decision to create exclusionary criteria based on our employee/employer relationship and even offered to write letters to advocate for inclusion. This was an important lesson in understanding the way Indigenous processes and teachings of relationship transcend Eurocentric values and perceptions. It was also a moment for me to reflect on the inconsistency I had created by crediting individuals with the need for this research and then disallowing their voice to be heard. Ultimately, this experience became a resource as I understand it to be validation of the need for the research based on the community's request to participate.

Because of the recognition of lived experience, a focus of the research was to be accessible. This was not reflected in the recruitment documentation when considered as standalone work. This was pointed out to me by my supervisor during presentations when I discussed the research in the agency. I made an assumption that it would be easier

academically to present the research in a more institutional way when I knew that in practice I would discuss, present, and engage with the content in a more relational and accessible method. Some of this was in response to expectations of the Human Research Ethics Board, however I own the reality that this was an area where I could have practiced more alignment. In hindsight, this may have contributed to people's initial disinterest in participation. This is a learning I take with me to future research work and am grateful that in this case people were able to look past the institutional approach to my recruitment strategy.

One of the unintended benefits of engaging with an agency was the access to a human resources department of professionals curious about staff and supervisor development. They were knowledgeable in some of the practical legal and labor board implications of various supervision practices. Being able to offer a conceptual framework for supervisors and staff is only as good as its ability to be applied practically. This relationship allowed for a deepening of contextual knowledge in the interpretation and analysis stage. The inclusion of human resources strategies and insight was not part of my proposal and yet it has turned into an important consideration in situations where a supervisor is also the employer.

The relationship between myself as an employee of the agency and myself as a researcher independent of the agency was difficult to distinguish. Relational work in this context required mutual diligence with clear boundaries regarding dual roles. The vulnerability I was concerned Indigenous staff I supervised would feel was actually my own. Once I had completed all of the conversations and reflected on their significance, it was challenging being in relation to the people who had power over my employment.

After working with and for Indigenous organizations, being in a Eurocentric agency activated a strong motivation for change, however this was not reciprocated and because the research was based in Indigenous knowledge, my responsibilities surpassed that of the organization. Through conversations with Dr. Makokis and all of the people who participated in the research, the decision was made to continue the work independently. Following the teachings of relational accountability, I was able to implement that change without a fracture in relationship with the agency.

4.5 Methods

Honoring all I have learned to this point and respecting the storytellers coming forward, the method most aligned was the “conversational method” as outlined by Margaret Kovach (2010). In her article, Kovach (2010) reinforces the understanding that all Indigenous methods are not necessarily unique to Indigenous paradigms, rather it is the paradigmatic approach that sets the conversational method apart. This method is aligned with an Indigenist approach and best suits the context given that the site of supervision and agency leadership is most commonly via dialogue. This approach is Indigenist because it “honors orality as means of transmitting knowledge and upholds the relational which is necessary to maintain a collectivist tradition” (Kovach, 2010, p. 42).

Using a dialogical method enacts anti-oppressive and decolonial practices because it invites the researcher to be vulnerable. I demonstrated vulnerability by identifying as a learner, by verbalizing power dynamics, practicing cultural protocols and being open to correction, and confirming consent and permission in a step-by-step way, rather than relying only on the consent form. Having a conversation required me to be present and attuned to what was being shared and the way it was being shared. I had to balance being

mindful to not interrupt and also recognizing that sometimes people are uncomfortable in silence and are hoping for direction. I explained multiple times that what people shared was not going to negatively or positively affect my education because people were intent that I as a researcher achieved a certain goal. It became apparent through the conversations that certain power dynamics can never be eliminated. My role as a researcher in this context was to ensure I was contributing all of my knowledge and intent to be anti-oppressive and decolonial.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) describes decolonization in research as a way of centering Indigenous concerns and worldviews, which implies the decentering of dominant colonial perspectives (p.41). The research consideration of Indigenous people as a workforce in human services has the potential to reinforce practices of white supremacy through the research process. Using a conversational method places my own subjectivity as a white researcher as a point of contention where it needs to be in relation to the storyteller. This acknowledgment was expressed every time I presented and spoke about the research and, in each case, I also acknowledged my own openness to alternate and critical perspectives. I recognize that words alone do not always establish enough safety for all people to express views on this topic, however my continuous availability and provision of private contact information also offered different access points.

Inviting people to participate involved an email to all staff at the agency where recruitment took place. It included an attachment of a letter further explaining the research, including people within the agency and University who people could contact (see Appendix A; Appendix B; Appendix C). After several months, no one replied, and that is when people began to approach me, requesting they be permitted to participate. At

that time, I began having conversations with the agency CEO and the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) to determine next steps. After receiving a clear path forward from the HREB and agreeance from the CEO, I pursued this path and, after two months, had completed single meetings with five people, one of which was not included in this thesis due to her unavailability to review the transcript prior to involvement.

The people who shared their stories were invited to meet at a location of their choosing where I would do all of the preparatory work. I ensured they understood that to hold the conversation at work was an option, however it could compromise confidentiality within the agency. I provided my home as an option in addition to their suggestions because I saw this as an additional resource that could honor relationship; two people chose my home and three chose my office. It is meaningful to note that the Elder from the initial Pipe Ceremony told me to hang the flags that were offered in both my home and office for the duration of the research. Three of the storytellers were individuals who I had pre-established relationships prior to our shared employment at the agency, one person I had developed a relationship through our work together, and the fifth person was internal to the agency and would have qualified initially as I was not directly linked to her position as an employee.

At the outset, I described to each person that I was going to offer them tobacco prior to reviewing the consent form out of respect for the Indigenous teachings I had been provided regarding the importance of protocol and the prioritizing of Indigenous methods (Makokis, 2001; Smith 2005). I clearly stated my intention and after we had established a shared understanding of the protocol, we reviewed the documentation as approved by the

HREB. Included in the consent form (Appendix B; Appendix C) was a request for permission to record and transcribe the conversation.

Each person consented to being audio recorded with transcription. The transcription was completed by an independent contact who is utilized by local researchers with whom I have relationships and the conditions of confidentiality were shared with the transcriber. Everyone was given the opportunity to request a review and approval of their transcripts prior to use and state how they would like to be represented. Two people requested to review transcripts. After contacting one person with the completed transcript, they replied initially to my attempt at sharing the document but then did not respond subsequently and according to the consent form this meant the transcript and their story was not used in the research. After no being able to reach this person, I followed up with a final communication stating their transcript would not be used. The other person responded to me that they no longer wished to review the transcript and that they consented to my use of it in the research.

As a supplement to the conversational method, I developed a list of questions as a reference guide (see Appendix D). I provided a list of these questions to each person participating, per the request of the HREB. I stated that the preferred method for the research was conversational and would be explored through dialogue, however if they prefer more structure, we could follow the questions. I brought copies of the questions to each conversation and offered them prior to recording. Each person preferred the conversational approach and the questions were not used. The questions were developed thoughtfully and used the Medicine Wheel model to provide a holistic perspective to the topic. The questions were strengths-based and emphasized the storytellers' expertise and

knowledge of their own experience. While these questions were not explicitly utilized, as a new researcher it was helpful to know I had something thoughtful and concrete to refer back to if I became stuck. In one way I think that was a responsible part of being a new researcher. In another way I think it detracted from opportunities to be vulnerable and contributed to the power imbalance.

At the conclusion of each meeting I offered everyone a gift of tea and a sweetgrass braid to express gratitude for sharing. According to what I have been taught, tea and sweetgrass, like our words, are medicine. Storytellers are sharing their words (medicine) with me, and I am reciprocating in kind.

Wilson (2008) describes personal meaningful change being in direct relation to the success of the research. Understanding that an Indigenous paradigm is directly related to Indigenist methodology which informs ethical research practice with Indigenous people is to acknowledge that ‘who’ we are is ‘how’ we are in the personal and professional. This was an accepted truth at the outset of my work so while I describe the methods in a formalized process, it is inevitable that many practices may not have been captured here. This could be because I do not recognize the connection or because they were intuitive and so my conscious mind did not capture their presence. This is a recognized limitation of living the research. It becomes so familiar that it can be difficult to differentiate research from experience and important elements are missed.

Throughout the recruitment phase I continued an educational approach to my pre-existing social work practice of hiring and supporting Indigenous staff with lived experience. I did this by learning more about human resource practices, offering consultative and relational support to increase the success of all staff with lived

experience. I followed direction given by Elders and Indigenous teachers in my life regarding protocols and ways of being, remained engaged in relevant local trainings and opportunities surrounding Indigenous research and approaches, and continued to broaden my scope as a practitioner by taking students and offering external supervision.

How I approached these engagements was primarily by invitation only unless, for example, they were open calls to a lecture. This method is important personally, and as a researcher, because I do not assume to know the intention of certain spaces. Asserting myself into contexts for my own benefit is to reinforce white privilege. If an event is culturally focused it may be only open to people of that culture and that needs to be respected. If invited, I prepared appropriately and if I was being asked to speak to something which was outside my experience, I would invite someone else to share with me. With this research in particular, Indigenous individuals had identified themselves with the topic and we would speak to people as a team.

Over the course of the recruitment phase I became increasingly unwell with chronic illness. After I had met with everyone who requested to participate in the research, I took a leave from school and focused on my recovery. Prior to taking the research independent of the agency, I consulted with everyone who shared their stories, the HREB, the Elder involved in the work, my thesis supervisor, and close supports. They were all in support of the decision. What became apparent as I pursued this research topic was the disconnection between the necessary outcome of honoring everyone's stories and the agency's capacity to be appropriately responsive.

My leave from school did not mean an absence of engagement or reflection so I began accepting invitations to engage in ceremony and, when appropriate, I asked for

prayers. What developed from this continued learning was a recognition that the further I involve myself in challenging colonial systems, the more I learn about my own needs regarding mental health and the importance of boundaries when working towards change. Change takes time and following Indigenous processes means trusting that the help I have asked for comes from a place beyond my control.

Chapter 5: Truth Telling

According to Kovach (2009), validity in Indigenous research is honoring to the subjectivity of the researcher and storytellers. This is done through centering research on truth as it is defined through relationship, paradigmatic connection, and community benefit (Kovach, 2009). Realizing how my relational accountability to the storytellers were guiding the research became an indicator that I was following proper protocols and processes (Potts & Brown, 2015; Wilson, 2008). Connecting teachings to the research process was a way of connecting an Indigenist philosophy to daily practices. Following the guidance I received from teachers and Elder Dr. Leona Makokis was a way of centering the research on relational truth.

Built into my professional practice framework is a continual reflection on who benefits from a particular decision or process. Bringing that into my role as a researcher increased my awareness of the many ways Indigenous social workers resist colonial workplace practices (Bennett, Zubrzycki, & Bacon, 2011; Boulton, Gifford, & Potaka-Osborne, 2009; Brown & Fraehlich, 2011; Brown & Fraehlich, 2014; Burke et al., 2016; Burke, 2018; Carrière & Peacock, 2015; Hair & O'Donoghue, 2009; Nelson et al., 2015; Peacock, 2009; Reid, 2005; Reynolds, 2007; Reynolds, 2010; Reynolds, 2019; Roche et al., 2013; Scerra, 2012; Templeton & Durksen, 2014; Walmsley, 2009; Whiteside, Tsey, McCalman, Cadet-James, & Wilson, 2006). Honoring resistance by contributing to helpful ways forward is how I hope to benefit Indigenous social workers with lived experience.

Prior to the research, I had relationships with all of the storytellers. Relying on the trust and connection we shared contributed significantly to how truth developed in the

research. Having shared experiences and knowing one another outside of the research process increased the insight we had into one another's intentions. It also decreased the potential for any misuse of power because I would have immediately either been addressed or noticed an unexplained change in the relationship. That this did not occur is not an indicator of perfection. It is a statement that because relationships are reciprocal and a reflection of shared truth, their ability to remain generative signals a form of validity within an Indigenist paradigm (Kovach 2009; Wilson 2008).

The outcome of this research aligns with preceding literature and stands to benefit the community (Bennett, Zubrzycki, & Bacon, 2011; Boulton, Gifford, & Potaka-Osborne, 2009; Brown & Fraehlich, 2011; Brown & Fraehlich, 2014; Burke et al., 2016; Burke, 2018; Carrière & Peacock, 2015; Hair & O'Donoghue, 2009; Nelson et al., 2015; Peacock, 2009; Reid, 2005; Reynolds, 2007; Reynolds, 2010; Reynolds, 2019; Roche et al., 2013; Scerra, 2012; Templeton & Durksen, 2014; Walmsley, 2009; Whiteside, Tsey, McCalman, Cadet-James, & Wilson, 2006). This has occurred beginning with my own subjectivity as a supervisor, learning through relationship with people I supervised the importance of receiving helpful support. Having this experience creates opportunities to offer other supervisors and staff the opportunity to think critically about how we do this work together.

As a demonstration of how I understand validity, I will tell this story. After speaking with storytellers, keeping the work confined to a community agency did not allow enough room to explore what is possible in relationship, which is ultimately a constraint on truth. If validity is truth through relationship then the relationship must be treated in a sacred way. As a researcher following Indigenist methods, I had a

responsibility to make a change to the research process, signaling that the stories people shared held more meaning than organizational priorities. This honored the truth that was shared, followed the teachings of an Indigenous paradigm, and benefitted the community of storytellers by ensuring their knowledge was honored on its own terms and not in relation to Eurocentric values.

Chapter 6: Ethics

One of the reflective tools I use in practice is to visualize myself as an old woman and contemplate how I might feel about the issue in focus from a different perspective. Connecting to wisdom internally and with other sources is a vital component of ethics and was demonstrated by beginning this work in ceremony where I asked for spiritual guidance as much as practical support. Cyndy Baskin (2016b) discusses values and ethics from an Indigenous worldview as contextual, collaborative, and subjective. Vikki Reynolds (2019) writes that our quest as ethical practitioners is to create relationships of dignity and respect, critically examining the structures that divide us (p. 79). Reynolds (2019) and Baskin (2016b) align by saying that ethics are lived and practiced collectively.

My forefront ethical consideration in this research was respectfully following the philosophy and theoretical framework. Setting intentions of working in a particular way enables ethical practice by demonstrating my values and approach. Acting in a way that aligns with anti-oppressive, decolonizing, and Indigenist methods is how I show my integrity and self-awareness. By doing what I intend I build my own capacity as a social worker and demonstrate to my community that I am trustworthy. The qualities of integrity, self-awareness, and trustworthiness support ethics to be collaborative and contextual because there is shared vision and evidence of self-sustainability. For example, if my framework did not include anti-oppressive theory there would not be a mechanism to contextualize my whiteness. That would show a lack of self-awareness and it would be concerning that I would be engaging in Indigenist research without identifying my own subjectivity. Failing to that could make me untrustworthy because I am concealing who I am in relation to the research. Doing so could cause people to

disengage from relationships, affecting the validity of the research, causing it to be unsustainable.

Ethical practice regarding my dual roles of practitioner and researcher contributed to growth, especially whenever there was a specific practice issue. At work, having awareness of a literature review and relational knowledge created strong convictions about best practices. Not all interventions can fully adhere to our values and ethics because discretion is involved (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012). There are some situations beyond my control. Other situations may result in losing employment or cause undue hardship for other people involved. Learning to maintain the highest standard as the measure while accommodating what is out of my control has been a significant insight. As a researcher I support transformation as part of the process, however I can only negotiate the limits of my own change.

Personal wellness is a significant part of ethics in the context of social work practice (Baskin 2011; Baskin, 2016b; Reynolds, 2019). If the starting place for this research is my own subjectivity then my wellness as a subject is of critical importance in the support and recognition of others. Relational accountability and ethics tend to deteriorate in practice when our wellness decreases. Part of my responsibility as a researcher was to take a leave and focus on my own health and stabilization at a time when I could not effectively contribute to the research process. This break became a critical part of my own transformation and deepened my understanding of the research topic by providing me with firsthand experiences of topic areas explored by storytellers.

Westernized beliefs of individualism, compartmentalization, and the need for control translate into ethical standards such as conflict of interest, power-over dynamics,

and personal bias or favoritism (Baskin, 2011; Baskin, 2016b; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). In an Indigenist approach the ethical standards require centering relationships, interdependence, and non-interference (Baskin, 2011; Baskin, 2016b; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Balancing my social location as a white settler researcher using decolonizing and Indigenist methods, the learning came from the community who I was seeking to benefit with this research that I had prioritized values uncondusive to the outcome I sought. Fortunately, this realization came within a timeframe where I could make necessary changes to honor the knowledge that was shared with me. This change was a turning point in the research and created the space for the storytellers who participated. Following this process was vital for ensuring that there was no perception of coercion and it is my belief that taking this incremental approach contributed to the process by demonstrating reflexivity.

Maintaining relational confidentiality and following the proposal took more conscious effort than I had anticipated. I believe this occurred because I am a new researcher and followed many pre-existing research standards not knowing how and why something different would be beneficial, the people who participated engage with me regularly in a working context and there is overlap in what they shared and what we discuss openly in our relationships. Addressing this has included thinking before speaking, declining to speak if people ask questions, and ensuring what I share in the findings is directly connected to what storytellers shared.

Chapter 7: Analysis & Interpretation

Analysis and interpretation are relational because stories are shared in a context that is co-created between the researcher and storyteller. Wilson (2008) states that an Indigenous methodology has to look at “all of those relations as a whole instead of breaking it down... [s]o it has to use more of an intuitive logic, rather than a linear logic, because you can’t just break everything down into small parts and use linear logic to bring them back together” (p. 119). Through my review of the transcripts, I used a lens of strength and resistance, paying attention to what the storytellers identify as promising practices. The storytellers have all been working in the social work field for many years and they expressed difficult experiences. In alignment with the Medicine Wheel model and Indigenous philosophy, these stories were treated as teachings for how to act in similar situations (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2009).

With each story shared I locate myself in relation to the storyteller and their experience. Kovach (2009) describes this approach as “less of a conundrum than thematic analysis because tribal knowledge systems value the interpretive and the subjective” (p. 131). Engaging in a reflective process honored the relationship I share with storytellers by acknowledging their subjectivity. The research topic is reflective of personal experience and ongoing conversations with colleagues doing similar work. I have my own subjectivity that informs the analysis and interpretation, meaning relationships are at the center. When relationships are embedded in the community the interconnection speaks to context and can support the validity of the research.

Because of the practical nature of the research topic and pre-existing relationships, there was little interpretive work that needed to occur. Much of what the

storytellers shared was literal, tangible, and something that we already had a context for relationally. Because of this, I followed a straightforward process of sharing significant findings as they unfolded through our conversation. I also provide context that speaks to overall insights in the introduction to each person. Some experiences did overlap for people, however the learnings they derived from the experiences varied and therefore so did the learning from their story. This is reflective of the overlap that occurs in the content among the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel yet how the representation of that content may differ.

Chapter 8: Data to Knowledge

8.1 Storytellers

When I first began reviewing the transcripts I read openly, revisiting the memory of our time together and connecting myself to the words on the page. Openly means I was curious when I noticed times that I could have used better language or asked clearer questions. It also means I distanced myself from meeting a research requirement and answering a specific question, listening to what was said without inserting my own agenda. I recalled the experience of offering protocol, setting an intention, and the words I used to describe the purpose of each piece of paper, including the presence of the recording device. I reflected on my relationship with each person, how we came to be in that space together, and in what ways I can honor their knowledge. Some of the experiences that were shared I had been witness to, or was involved in, but that was not the focal point of the sharing.

Following my proposed interpretive process, I challenged my settler mind to continually ground in the Medicine Wheel as a practice in rigor with an Indigenist approach. For example, as I was reading, certain stories or comments would feel impactful. When that happened I would pause and make notes about the impact I experienced. I would ask myself questions about the context of what was shared, reflecting on the strengths and challenges of the situation. This helped to balance the function of our relationship with the intent and purpose of the research.

My assumption in this process was that each person would offer insights into each quadrant of the Medicine Wheel and then those pieces would be brought together as a whole. As I engaged further with the transcripts and had continued relationships with the individuals, I saw that I had made an assumption each person would offer a balanced

perspective. What emerged from my context building process was a realization that each person contributed to the research in an area of personal knowledge, that when brought together, offered a balanced model. With this analysis, I introduce each person correlating to the spiritual, physical, emotional, or mental area that they primarily represent. First, I will after provide an overview of the findings and an introduction to what holds the center of the four quadrants together as a whole.

8.2 Respect

After I had met with one of the storytellers, I was given the framework for this research through a teaching. The message I kept hearing from the storytellers was that to do our best work, we need to be seen unconditionally. Being seen unconditionally means that every aspect of a person is acknowledged and accepted as having value. To see someone unconditionally means they are not totalized because totality is conditional. As a supervisor it means recognizing and honoring an employee as a whole person foremost and secondarily integrating workplace roles and responsibilities.

For example, I supervised a woman who had recently moved into a new house with her family and she shared with me that there were spiritual concerns with the home. At the time, there were considerable demands at work and she was asking for flexibility with her schedule to accommodate addressing the concerns. My first reaction internally was disappointment because I prioritized our working relationship and the needs of the job. As I further reflected, I recalled the foundational role spirituality plays in an Indigenous worldview. I made the connection that if she was not able to ground herself and her family spiritually, then her work would also struggle. I challenged myself to recognize her spiritual and cultural responsibilities as an unconditional aspect of her

being. Even though I had little understanding, thus avoiding a totalizing approach, I worked collaboratively with her to accommodate the spiritual need while addressing workplace responsibility.

Committing to see someone unconditionally does not dismiss the limitations or biases that we carry. We accept that they exist and will inevitably present in the relationship. Once identified, they can be explored and processed in a way that works to minimize impact over time. In the example above, I had no frame of reference for the spiritual need my colleague was experiencing. We did have a relationship that supported her ability to share her needs even though I had limited capacity to relate to the context. This was a limitation I recognized in myself and it did not prevent me from being supportive. I recognized my colleague as someone who needed to be supported with a quality of care as we navigated cultural differences.

Setting an intention to unconditionally see another human being means I make the same effort to unconditionally see myself. This includes exploring personal experiences as they impact practice. There were times in the example above that I reflected on how I could have been a better support. Did I appropriately balance the responsibilities of the job with my colleague's personal needs? How was I colonial in our interactions and how was I decolonial? What did our team perceive? Learning personal balance between being reflective and self-disparaging can be a challenge. Cyndy Baskin (2016b) refers to the important of self-reflexivity by suggesting we look at ourselves as through the lens of wholeness. Noticing ourselves unconditionally is the standard we set for how we will experience other people.

Supporting people with lived experience begins with an acceptance that we have our own. Working in relationship can lead to enmeshment and so maintaining boundaries that support personal responsibility is vital (Reynolds, 2019b). One of the ways I practice this is by reflecting on my intentions. Liking or not liking someone can impact how I want to provide support. If I am being accommodating, I will often reflect on whether or not I would provide the same accommodation if my personal attachment to them was different. In the context of relational practice, this can be a powerful way to determine enabling behavior. Lived experience can imply that individuals have more survival-based expertise than people with relatively more privilege. This can include skill and knowledge in determining areas where social workers struggle with boundaries. Maintaining clear role expectations and establishing working environments that encourage critique are essential to supporting sustainable work (Reynolds, 2019a). For example, if a team member with lived experience has often had to please people to get their needs met, they may enable people who are accessing services and be an agreeable employee. This may appear like good work because there is no conflict, however working through conflict can be a vital part of having lived experience be a benefit to people who need support.

Based on my learning, thinking about lived experience in a linear way is one of the common reasons relationships break down between supervisors and staff. We are all human and regardless of the personal healing work we have done, there is always the possibility that our trauma or struggles will become activated. Because of this, what has come out of the research is the concept of “healing experience” as both a hiring consideration and supervisory practice. Hiring people with lived experience implies that

trauma and pain qualifies the provision of support. A deficit-based perspective, it can setup staff and supervisors to focus on hardship rather than healing and wellness work. Hiring people for their healing experience instead of lived experience sets an expectation of how we should be providing support to people accessing services. A recovery lens encourages social workers to focus on the ways resistance and personal responsibility has contributed to success. It is also the foundation that we build on when staff are unwell or need support. Acknowledging someone's healing experience is a demonstration of respect because it recognizes pre-existing capacity to care for oneself (Richardson & Wade, 2010).

I understand the starting place of respect as personal responsibility, a security in our place in the world. It is not threatened by the expressions of others and allows for the exploration of growth in a dignified and honest way. The teaching of the Buffalo from the Seven Grandfather Teachings was front of mind while developing this model because in the same way that each part of the animal was honored and put to good use for the community, the same opportunity and care can go into supporting and inviting Indigenous staff with healing experience into social work positions. Throughout my relationships with Elder Dr. Leona Makokis, the people who shared their stories in this research, and nearly all experiences where I have been taught about an Indigenous worldview, there is knowledge shared regarding the Seven Grandfather Teachings. Empowering the Spirit (2020), an online teaching resource, states, "respect is the condition of being honoured." This teaching is demonstrated by the buffalo sharing every part of its being with Indigenous families for existence and daily functioning.

The Medicine Wheel is also represented by the Buffalo and teachings about sharing (Absolon, 2016; Makokis 2001). Bernie in Makokis (2001) states that:

[I]n order to live, we have to depend on the animals for our survival. In our teachings about sharing, our grandfathers would tell us that the buffalo represented the concept of sharing. The buffalo gave up its life so that we could have food, medicine, clothing, and shelter. This is the ultimate in sharing. (p. 98).

As a settler, my experiences in the world are built on the concept of taking. I am also socialized and encouraged to think and act in a colonial way that values selfishness. One of the ways I can address colonial violence is by taking personal responsibility to be decolonizing. Through my practice as a supervisor, I work to unconditionally value the healing experience of Indigenous staff by decentering myself and sharing what I have to offer.

It was after spending time with Participant 1 who represents the emotional aspect of this research that I began reflecting on the teaching of the Buffalo as a framework. Participant 1 (name chosen by the storyteller) and I have been friends for many years and have worked together at two different non-profit agencies. She is well known for her emotional kindness and generosity. Her insights on supervision of people with healing experience, and requiring those supports herself, were offered in a way that demonstrated emotional grounding and an expression of care for the impacts of working with her community. Knowing I was engaged in Indigenist methods and informed by Indigenous teachings, I considered that the findings would include a conceptually cultural expression. In my use of this concept is an acknowledgment that what I am sharing is permissible for me to share with others by offering protocol and having conversations with people supporting the research. Respect, healing experience, and a commitment to

seeing people unconditionally are the center of the circle as we move through the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel to gain additional knowledge.

8.3 Whooping Crane

Whooping Crane was a storyteller who had a spiritual approach to sharing. He spoke in stories that connected multiple aspects of self and practice. He was the only man who participated and what stood out was not only what he shared, but how he shared. This experience became difficult to capture in words because, as Baskin (2016a) states, “spirituality embodies an interconnectedness and interrelationship with all life” (p. 52). Baskin (2016a) goes on to share that within “Indigenous worldviews and spirituality, there is no separation between people and the land” (p. 52). Many prominent researchers describe at length the significant and intrinsic function of spirituality in their work that includes dreams, intuitions, reflections, teachings, protocol, ceremony, relationships, and a range of personal and shared, frequent and unique practices (Absolon, 2016; Baskin, 2011; Baskin, 2016a; Baskin, 2016b; Kovach 2009; Smith 2000; Wilson 2008).

These insights have been evident in the relationship I share with Whooping Crane through the way he tells his stories by grounding himself in location. Each time he spoke he located himself in relation to the land and sometimes emotionally or mentally. He would speak in a circular way where all of the elements of the story tied together. Implied in his stories was a vision for how helpers have a responsibility to work together. Many of his stories spoke of personal barriers that prevent us from working together and how we can kindly support one another to notice them and make adjustments.

Having a work environment where spiritual practices are normalized establishes an element of service delivery that is in existence for its own benefits rather than an

intervention in response to someone's struggle. Spirituality connects us and, as Whooping Crane shared, "it's helped me stay humble and it's helped me not to forget about myself at the same time." Experiencing spiritual practices in relationship can address power imbalances because we are unified by acknowledging our own humility. Whooping Crane discusses the following areas as central to creating workspaces where staff can offer helpful supports:

The Self is Sacred

When we engage in spiritually safe workplaces we are making a statement about belonging. Environments that are spiritually expressive can make some people feel vulnerable because spiritual practices are personal. There can also be circumstances where people believe in conversion practices that hinder belonging by asserting dominance. Whooping Crane expressed the importance of gently supporting and guiding vulnerability and appreciating its value in self-understanding:

...I'm just totally myself right, and then I'm okay to share that part right, at that moment to take off the hat and leave it at the door kind of thing and... that the degree of vulnerability kind of just is present and it's being respected...it's easy for me to understand, you know, and how important it is not to be so judgmental.

He also talked about having a "healthy curiosity about why my life was the way it was" and that reflects the importance of being gentle with ourselves as we explore the many dimensions of our being. He continues:

...there's just that moment, you know, with a healthy connection to what brought us together at that moment with the smudge, you know...and it's pretty powerful, impactful.

When we understand ourselves as sacred and have the ability to be ourselves in the workplace, we are better equipped to support the development and growth in ourselves and all relationships. Baskin (2011, 2016b) references this by talking about how the self

is first in the circle. Taking the time to see ourselves as sacred beings models a level of caring that humanizes decision-making and approaches to supervision because if I am sacred then so is everyone else. Supervisors who do not have a well-developed sense of self and who do not value themselves are at risk of transferring that perspective onto staff. Supporting staff with healing experience requires a grounding in self-knowledge with an openness to growth and increased understanding.

Sacred Practices

Understanding the self as sacred is different from sacred practices because each person's expression of spirituality looks different, even if the underlying beliefs and philosophies are the same. Spiritual practices in the workplace must take into account the violent acts of people acting on religious and Christian ideology (Lavallée, 2010; Baskin, 2011; Baskin 2016a; Baskin, 2016b). It is not uncommon for people to combine Christian practices with Indigenous spirituality and the supervisor's role is to avoid judgement and ensure that whatever the practices may be, that they are supportive of the people being served. Whooping Crane talked about the importance of being able to engage in Indigenous ceremony with his supervisor and how that positively impacted their relationship:

I was a part of the process to like put up a sweat... I was pretty proud of that and then... just witnessing their intrigue and their participation for what it was worth, you know, like for our [supervisor to come] into the sweat... that was good... and it was nice to see, you know, them relax a little bit and be themselves around the lodge.

He also expressed the value of being able to naturally engage in ceremony without employer barriers. Maintaining open access in the workplace serves staff and people accessing services by taking a decolonial approach to organizational spaces. For example,

Indigenous spiritual practices were once legally prohibited so encouraging open access that is normalized can send a message of spiritual and cultural safety.

Learning

Whooping Crane discussed the importance of being discerning regarding who we accept as our teachers. To demonstrate this, he told a story about an older Indigenous woman who was on the phone in a public space. She was upset about something and believed people had not treated her respectfully. She had spiritual belongings with her and was acting in a way incongruent with the teachings those belongings represented. Whooping Crane's response to the woman was to approach her and validate the feelings she was expressing over the phone. He then suggested that she take time to take care of herself. He then identified himself through talking about his family, his home, and his role in the community. It turned out they knew some of the same people and established a relational connection.

Whooping Crane talked about the role of strictness, protocol, and how we support one another to be accountable. In the story he was in a difficult position of publicly correcting someone who he did not have a relationship with and who was in a position of honor. Acknowledging spirituality in our work means that we welcome the strength along with the learning. While there may be strict teachers in our life, Whooping Crane believes that we are not meant to learn in a strict way. What we learn from the story is that at times we will be responsible to teach people who hold positions that imply they have already mastered certain practices. This may be true of a supervisor approaching a staff and the staff approaching a supervisor. When we know someone is struggling to practice

their values, we have a responsibility to listen and offer opportunities for them to self-correct.

We are all familiar with how it feels to learn in a strict way and often that kind of approach leaves us resentful of the method and therefore blinded to the content or truth in what is being shared. It is inevitable that we will make mistakes and how we encourage one another to learn can determine the quality our growth. Whooping Crane referred to teaching as a “natural process” that supports people to notice the lesson and then apply it as they see fit. For supervisors, there may not always be time for this method depending on the lesson, however developing relationships and working preventatively rather than reactively builds in natural processes from the ground up, rather than attempting to implement retrospectively.

Reciprocity

Whooping Crane discussed the importance of sharing, whether that be relationally, through teachings, medicine, or knowledge. He states:

...there's culture right and there's ways of practicing that I believe, like in a good way, done in a good way by good people right, so... it's helped me stay humble and it's helped me to not forget about myself at the same time.

As supervisors in organizations where resources may be limited, performance expectations of staff and managers can be high (Bennett, Zubrzycki, & Bacon, 2011; Boulton, Gifford, & Potaka-Osborne, 2009; Brown & Fraehlich, 2011; Brown & Fraehlich, 2014; Burke et al., 2016; Burke, 2018; Carrière & Peacock, 2015; Hair & O'Donoghue, 2009; Nelson et al., 2015; Peacock, 2009; Reid, 2005; Reynolds, 2007; Reynolds, 2010; Reynolds, 2019; Roche et al., 2013; Scerra, 2012; Templeton & Durksen, 2014; Walmsley, 2009; Whiteside, Tsey, McCalman, Cadet-James, & Wilson,

2006). When staff are generous with what they have to offer, especially from a cultural perspective, there is a responsibility to reciprocate appropriately. Whooping Crane teaches us that when these practices are celebrated, the staff benefit and receive from them as well.

From the perspective of spirituality, this may not be something that an organization wants or is willing to do formally because it challenges capitalist business-based mandates. When inviting Indigenous ceremony and processes into the workspace the reciprocal dynamic becomes an ethical consideration to ensure staff are not being exploited or tokenized - and that knowledge and culture is not being appropriated (Lavallée, 2010).

Personal Responsibility

Exploring and normalizing spirituality in the workplace necessitates a high level of personal responsibility to ensure that people being served are provided the space and supports to explore how they want to exist spiritually. Whooping Crane describes his experience:

...I've learned to educate myself... like my own journey, like what was being an adolescent, Indigenous adolescent at that time, to learn and educate myself [on] the different phases of my life.

Self-education through spiritual means can occur in relationship with people accessing services and there are ways to share that helpfully and meaningfully. Supervisors must prepare to support staff uncovering personal insights while balancing how to be effective at work. Spirituality can also imply a differing worldview that distinguishes the supervisor from an employee on a paradigmatic level which may contribute to tension or conflict. The supervisor has a responsibility to support staff in who they are spiritually

while holding the standard that each person deserves this opportunity without causing harm. There are some tangible ways this may impact the supervisor.

Protocols

Whooping Crane referenced the importance of protocols and strictness while also recognizing the best way to learn and teach in caring environments. There may be multiple protocols for how to support a similar spiritual practice. For example, people may share a spiritual practice by name, however there may be different teachings about how each person follows the practice. Being open to learning new ways and being aware of when local or specific protocols should be followed can model trusting and supportive relationships. Important considerations in these situations include taking into account the role of Indigenous people in leading Indigenous spiritual practices, understanding Indigenous protocols vary and it is ok for people to have spiritual boundaries, and taking responsibility if certain feelings like defensiveness, criticism, or judgement come forward.

As Whooping Crane shared in his story, spiritual growth and accountability is about allowing people the space to apply lessons in their own way. Forcing judgment on people has the potential to invoke harmful feelings of shame, guilt, and be counterproductive to the intention of belonging.

Whooping Crane demonstrated many of the values and ethics of what I have been taught about an Indigenous worldview. Teaching by modeling and following a holistic approach to sharing was part of what signaled this knowledge as significantly spiritual because he allowed me as the researcher to make my own meaning and see myself in what was shared (Makokis, 2001).

8.4 Karen Bruno

The physical aspect of the Medicine Wheel represents being active, tangible, and “actualizes the Spirit, heart and mind of the search” (Absolon, 2016, p. 132; Makokis, 2000; Thomas & Green, 2007). Karen Bruno has been working in human services for nearly 3 decades and identifies as someone with lived experience in addition to being a leader in the community. She is highly regarded for her inner-city experience as a leader, manager, and cultural helper. Through our relationship and work together I have witnessed, and learned from, her extraordinary practice. Karen is practical and can actualize concepts in creative and helpful ways. Years of experience in human services as a supervisor and employee with healing experience have provided Karen with incredible knowledge in supervision practices.

Expectations

Regardless of the supports that staff may need, we all must meet a professional threshold regarding the duties of our job. Employees with healing experience may require support in specific areas and that does not enable less responsibility. Karen shares her process for beginning working relationships:

Well usually I have a conversation ahead of time, before I even hire them, like if this goes sideways, what's our safety plan? So I kind of predict a little bit, like when I interview them and hire them, I'd have like a prediction as to what might go wrong and I have a conversation with them, like I'm gonna hire you, you know, these are some of my concerns going forward. If this happens, what's our plan so that you can still be successful and just kind of make a bit of a safety plan and I let them know 'cause at the end of the day, this is a job, this isn't a charity or a handout, it's a job and we're responsible for people. Again, that's that loyalty thing, you know, we're responsible for people.

Being appropriately responsive challenges the responsibility of a supervisor to ensure quality support is being provided. When a supervisor prepares to hire a staff with healing

experience, the issues of enablement and reactivity are highlighted. When people are enabled, they are unlikely to grow and it signals a concern that the supervisor may need to explore their own boundary development. When supervisors are reactive it jeopardizes the relationship with staff by depleting trust. Supervisors are responsible to offer staff opportunities to respond to concerns in a timely manner while maintaining an awareness of potential harms that could result from a failure to follow through. Providing too many opportunities to address the same concern can result in perpetual damage to the staff by frustrating their desire to change. This can cause harm to the person accessing services by sending a message that enabling behavior is acceptable.

Supervisors and staff should be aware of provincial and federal legislation and compliance expectations regarding human resources, the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and provincial labor standards (Government of Canada, 1985). Employers have a Duty to Accommodate when employees disclose certain information regarding their experiences and disregarding those duties is discrimination (Government of Canada, 1985). Hiring candidates when they disclose lived experience in an interview should be the indicator for supervisors to begin preparing for how they may need to provide relevant and helpful support. For example, if someone is hired and in the first supervision they reference a mental health diagnosis that is impacting their work, the supervisor has a legal responsibility to accommodate.

Human resources and the relationship with a manager or supervisor can have a significant impact on the success of a staff with lived experience. For Karen, accommodating staff can be informal or formal depending on the extent of support

required. For example, if someone requires a particular method of communication or a shift switch, those can easily be done at a relational level. Involving legal aspects into employment can be daunting because it involves asserting outside authority into a workplace relationship. Sometimes it may be necessary as an education for the workplace and the employee because human rights are upheld according to a standard. As Karen shares, most often this is something that can be discussed and negotiated in the context of the supervisory relationship, signaling good working dynamics.

Work Environment

Bringing Indigenous staff with healing experience into a work environment where their gifts are not readily recognized has the potential to become a tokenizing and exploitive relationship. Karen shares:

...when you're raised in a system, like when you're raised in poverty, on welfare, around children's services, around agencies, you know, when you're raised in a system of needing assistance, your privacy, your story, your personal story, that kind of thing is not... honored as a personal thing, it's like everybody's business. So you don't learn boundaries about sharing personal information because you're asked it nine million times... so I learned a really good balance between that professional and personal kind of thing and lived experience and professional experience so, you know, that's kind of like one of the biggest challenges I see with people who have lived experience, is they're just an open book because the system's trained them that way and I find myself repeating the same things that were told to me from other professionals. You have the right to privacy.

Supporting Indigenous staff who may struggle to balance personal and professional will need opportunities to learn. This includes conversations that can invite the vulnerability of both employee and supervisor. Many supervisors may not be able to structurally frame the conversation as Karen has in terms of the impact systems have on people's lives.

People hired based on their healing experience qualifications should have access to the same development opportunities as staff hired for their educational qualifiers to promote

mobility and growth. In school, social workers are taught about the professional use of self. Anyone who has not had that experience may need support to understand what that means and how it applies in a workplace.

When people are being tokenized, they often end up stuck in the same position for years, struggling with the same issues, and being relied upon for the same performance. Karen sees this often with people who have healing experience and are hired by the agency where they may have accessed services. The individuals are no longer requiring services, reach a point in their recovery, and then are hired but not encouraged to continue growing. It is inappropriate for employers to use Indigenous staff as a symbol of inclusion, progression, or development in the workplace.

Supervisors who wish to benefit from having Indigenous staff in public roles need to take responsibility for the work environment. Some organizations have oppressive practices that take advantage of the visibility of hiring Indigenous employees without taking on the work of making the environment as beneficial to the staff as it is to the employer. Karen says that recognizing Indigenous staff for cultural work is important because acknowledgement is a traditional practice. In a Eurocentric context, this may be interpreted as prideful and lacking humility. This is one way Indigenous staff who share their gifts may be tokenized and exploited because teachings of recognition and relational protocol are not followed when Indigenous knowledge is shared. Karen goes on to say that when these teachings are not followed it is the Indigenous staff's reputation with their community that becomes jeopardized because as an Indigenous person there is a responsibility to share knowledge responsibly. This means that now the staff has taken on risk in relationships with teachers and community, as well as in the workplace. This is

because now the staff must account for the knowledge shared and now may be in a position to negotiate a boundary with the employer. Through this example we can see how the teachings of interconnection and spiritual practices are evident in the workplace. Work environments are connected to the way supervisors and human resource professionals engage with Indigenous staff. In the same way each quadrant of the Medicine Wheel is connected, so are the different aspects of a work environment that an employee experiences. As a supervisors, it is important to be educated in these overlaps and advocate for appropriate changes.

Team Dynamic

If it is a common practice to hire staff with healing experience then it must be known by the entire team. Karen discusses her approach to supporting a strong team:

I'll have your guys' back, you have my back, you know, kind of thing by proving it. Team activities, humor, lots of humor, just really getting to know them, like individually, getting to know them as a group...creating that space of team, coming up with like codes of ethics... making them all feel special, you know, for their each individual contributions.

It is often not enough for only the supervisor to be aware and working together with the employee. The likelihood is high that healing experience goes under-reported in workplaces and encouraging staff to focus on their healing and recovery practices benefits the team and people being served (Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins, & Altschul, 2011). Karen points to the role of humor and acknowledging what makes each person special. Seeing people unconditionally and loving who they are promotes positive self-image. Karen also develops codes of how to engage with one another, setting the tone for how she expects her team to work with or without her supervision. That approach gives

the team boundaries to work within that are supportive and not dependent on a singular relationship for success.

Having open conversations when people are doing well also contributes to better dynamics when people are struggling. We all work towards balance and experience periods of being unwell. Supervisors model for their team how people should be treated when they are unwell and staff with healing experience may require support that seems extraneous. This will be explored further on and can include behavioral and emotional responses associated with trauma, including a deterioration of mental health. Because of the power a supervisor has, encouraging strong relationships among the team is preventative in supporting someone with lived experience.

Supervisor's Capacity

As a supervisor, if you do not have the time or minimal skillset to provide support to people with healing experience, then do not hire. Karen spoke about many attributes that make a qualified supervisor. I have set them apart as a subset of the findings because they are specific to the supervisor's capacity. In the context of this research a minimal skillset includes:

- An ability to self-locate and have open conversations about structural factors that contribute to lived experience. Karen shares:

...when you're on the street or when you have mental health issues or you have addictions, that stuff strips you away from like all race, color, kind of thing. You're usually down to your core humanity...you all have that in common...The only difference is that as Indigenous people, we don't have the privilege sometimes of coming out of it so easy, whereas non-Indigenous people have that privilege to get help or get support a lot easier than we would. So the difference I see sometimes is the fight. Indigenous people tend to be a little more defensive, they have a little more fight in them so...that and incorporating like their Indigenous way of being. That's the difference, whereas non-Indigenous people, they'll have

some similar traits but they're a little bit more easily assimilated, the signs of oppression are not...there as much as Indigenous people.

Karen says she can see similarities between the lived experience of a particular struggle, and how it matters who is experiencing that struggle. As a supervisor, understanding how identity informs our struggle and healing is important to offer helpful supports. For example, I grew up with Christianity being a mechanism for abuse by my parents. When I hear stories of the role Christianity plays in colonization, I can make personal connections. This personal meaning is not the same as an Indigenous person who has experiences of Christianity being a mechanism for abuse by a parent. While my personal experience and own healing work informs the support I offer, I cannot generalize my experience or make it comparable to my relationships with Indigenous people I supervise. This is because, as Karen said, I have privilege, access to supports designed to help me succeed, and therefore less skill in surviving independently. Defensiveness and fighting to meet a need are opportunities to explore the connection between personal professional. Responding appropriately as a supervisor can build relationship and contribute to healing.

- An ability to act on self-location. This includes education, advocacy, and ultimately requires taking on personal and professional risk to ensure people are treated with respect and dignity. Karen provides an example:

Indigenous people come with more complexity around their traumas because it tends to be sometimes more generational and so ingrained, it never really ends...whereas non-Indigenous people they have that privilege and their experience was their experience but they're not usually dealing with generational issues. So for example, I'll use an example that drives supervisors nuts and they don't know how to deal with it when it comes to Indigenous people. Funerals, we can go to a funeral just about

every day and that will be like our... close family, it's our aunts or uncles or cousins... whereas non-Indigenous, you know, they go to funerals... not that often and so you only get so many sick days and holiday times... and then as Indigenous people, we have [ceremonial] obligations to going to funerals. So that's where policies and procedures around personal time, sick time, that kind of thing need to be discussed and negotiated.

In my experience, time management has had to be flexible when supporting staff with healing experience. To support spiritual practices, Indigenous staff may require time off. This may include periods of time to follow ceremonies across different territories, last minute time off due to the availability of Elders, and the consideration that ceremonies do not follow strict timing. Time off may also be required to prepare for ceremonies, to support family members who are participating, and to follow up on instructions that came from a ceremony. This is not a complete list and it is important to have a relationship where you can have a respectful dialogue about balancing workplace constraints and spiritual protocols that may supersede an employer's demands.

- An ability to effectively support people exploring feelings and thoughts while maintaining an appropriate level of containment and professionalism. When staff are struggling there is the possibility that they may unpack traumatic events that the supervisor is not capable of effectively supporting. This can begin as early as the interview process as Karen states:

Indigenous people don't interview well at all, we don't sit there and boast and brag about our success, we're very literal, we don't expand on stuff unless you're asked so you need to know how to ask. [W]e're very relational and unfortunately... human resources don't allow for that relational piece to come out... in interviews, so, you know, usually when I'm interviewing I go off script which drives HR crazy but I need to follow my instincts and my Natural Law.

Providing appropriate support includes kindness and listening, knowing the limits of the supervisory relationship, and making suggestions or referrals for next steps. Reflecting on cultural difference as opposed to meeting standards is an important consideration. For example, when I first started supervising I was eager to make change. A woman who had been a supervisor for years and chose to work frontline instead was discussing a barrier to her work. Enthusiastically, I began brainstorming all the ways I was going to advocate. She looked at me and said “holy, slow your roll!” I paused for a minute and realized that I had been approaching support from a place that made me feel effective rather than continuing to listen for what was needed. To this day, I remember her words and reflect on them when I feel myself being reactive. Like Karen says, sometimes we need to go off script and question if what we are doing is actually getting us the information we need to make a good decision.

- An ability to be relationally available and flexible. Supporting people with healing experience can take up a considerable amount of time, emotional labor, and is not something that always ends with the workday. Karen shares some of her strategies:

So when I work with someone, I'm always explaining what I'm doing and why, even if they don't ask, I'm explaining why I made that decision and like what I'm doing and why, like even when I'm scheming, I'm pretty open that I'm scheming... I'm planting that seed already so that they can warm up so when I do get them to do this, that seed's already planned and it's not such a shock...I'm pretty open even with my employees, like nothing's an ambush or a surprise, like if I think they're behaving horribly, I'm usually like telling them, "you're behaving horribly, that was not called for" or whatever kind of thing... I don't wait for supervision kind of thing, that's why my supervisions are kind of boring because I'm... kind of supervising all the time, like everything they do... I, in return, ask

them for feedback, like all the time and they provide me support so it's like a really reciprocal relationship.

When we see people unconditionally and work from a place of strength, the motivation for relationship becomes internally located. There is a noticeable difference when the supervisor/supervisee relationship relies solely on practice standards, workplace policies, and social expectations. If developing a genuine relationship is an invitation extended to all team members then compliance with standards typically becomes a by-product. Karen talk about how she focuses on the relationship, acknowledging strengths, and plants seeds.

Once the seeds are planted people begin thinking about how they can contribute to the working relationship. This eliminates some of the feelings of powerlessness staff may feel because tasks are being delegated and it feels out of scope. It also demonstrates flexibility on Karen's part because if the staff does not have a natural ability to complete the task, the seed will not grow and she can look elsewhere. Karen also creates an environment where people can voice what they are thinking and feeling. This involves being present and available, always ready to support and navigate staff experiences in real time.

- An ability to prioritize the needs of people accessing services. Karen's lived experience places her at a unique intersection between community member and staff. She states:

I have faith in the people that we serve, that they're gonna call [staff] on it, like ninety percent of the time, if someone's being racist or ignorant or something...and I let them know ahead of time if a community member's... starting to be racist back at you, it's probably 'cause that's what you're presenting to them so be prepared kind of thing. So for instance, I had a female staff who was a very strong feminist and she had some issues with men and yeah, it showed pretty fast and the males responded to her in a

negative way pretty fast and she had to work on that, she had to find some balance but at the same time still being able to keep her feminist perspective but to find some balance to work with this population so she had to deal with that and I supported her through that, like every step of the way so there was like, you know, there was some reality checks that she had to do for herself.

People being served deserve the absolute best and so do the employees. Karen's trust in the people we serve is one of the ways she gathers information on what support her staff need. She is attuned to the working dynamics of frontline staff and builds on that to develop relational capacity. If a staff is not doing well, their ability to provide the best is compromised. Similarly, if the person being supported is not provided what they need, this impacts their ability to succeed.

Asking Indigenous staff with healing experience to access a time of life that has been challenging as a means to provide effective interventions is more emotional work than asking a university graduate to recall a particular theory and apply it repeatedly. The request of staff with healing experience is personal and consequently more complicated. Therefore, the support provided must correspond appropriately to ensure the service delivery relationship is beneficial to those involved.

It is easy to obscure the needs of people accessing services for a desire to look and feel good. It is common to hear about the disproportionate number of Indigenous peoples receiving human service supports and the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in welfare systems (Adams, Paasse, & Clinch, 2011; Chartrand, 2019; Krieg, 2016; McCauley, & Matheson, 2018; Shier, Graham, Fukuda, & Turner, 2015; Walsh, McMillan, Stewart, & Wheeler, 2018; Wildcat,

2015). Referring to people as ‘disproportionate’ or ‘overrepresented’ decenters the racist policies and structural violence targeting Indigenous peoples.

With the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), *Idle No More*, and The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, increasingly public work has been done to create a common understanding and challenge complicity and racism among all levels of service provision (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019a; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019b). Part of this development is a keen interest in having Indigenous culture available through education and services. Without following proper protocols and processes, this availability can be merely performative. Part of the performance includes hiring Indigenous staff by recognizing that having a majority non-Indigenous workforce supporting a majority Indigenous client-base appears out of touch, with racist implications. Upholding the dignity and needs of the people we work with is a source of knowledge and strength because we are engaged in reciprocal relationships. Our work is informed by the strength and insight of who we support and we can derive meaningful supervisory direction from appropriately navigating these relationships.

The significance of the physical aspect is that often social service work is values-based and discussion regarding practice is conceptual. This fits a particular ability in practitioners when the time comes to implement an intention. Translating conceptual knowledge into effective practices is important because it demystifies our work. Clarity increases impact because processes are available to people with many different abilities.

There are certain physical standards and regulations that exist for the protection of the employee and to inform the employer how to be equitable. Some supervisors include an assessment of risk when hiring people with healing experience which only increases the importance of being knowledgeable and familiar with supportive practices in this area. Supportive work environments rely on relationships to mitigate most risk. This approach builds community by honoring identity and healing experience.

8.5 Participant 1

Emotions represent our ability to feel connected, the quality of relationships, and the way we do our work rather than the outcomes produced (Absolon, 2010; Absolon, 2016; Makokis, 2001; Thomas & Green, 2007). In contrast to the other aspects of the Medicine Wheel, emotional subjectivity can be more vulnerable because addressing a need for change is entirely internal and interventions may require therapeutic supports. Whereas a mental health diagnosis falls under an employer's duty to accommodate, an emotional state is addressed relationally. This is an incredible opportunity to offer spaces with "structured safety" (Reynolds, 2019) that encourage emotional exploration because often the people accessing services also require emotional supports.

Participant 1 has chosen this name because of her desire to remain anonymous. When we first met, our connection was immediate. We were both volunteering and shared a similar sense of humor, giggling and laughing the entire afternoon. As our relationship developed I learned that one of her strengths is how she regulates herself emotionally through spiritual practices and personal insight. Witnessing her strength in stressful situations has taught me that that regulation is different from disconnection. Her

involvement in the research has provided grounding as discussed in a previous section.

The following are insights from our conversation:

Sharing

Most apparent in what Participant 1 shared was the connection between sharing and the presence of hope. Kovach (2009) states that reciprocity is “an ethical starting place” as are good relations (p. 19). Beginning relationships with the ethical responsibility to give implies that we have a shared recognition of gratitude preceding our own actions. Acknowledging this demonstrates humility and an interconnection with a higher power. Participant 1 demonstrates through this story:

I've always... want[ed] to be someone that could make a difference in somebody's life to help encourage and motivate somebody to get to where they want to... when I look back at all of my helpers that have impacted my life, to create change for myself and for my own family, it was the relationships that I've had with those people that really made a difference for me and that's something that I wanted to also contribute and give back to my own community.

The continuous exchange of offering and receiving care is a motivating force in the life of Participant 1. Many people who get into the helping profession cite a desire to give back to show gratitude for what they have received.

An ethical starting place of giving shows our commitment to personal wellness. What Participant 1 models is a fluidity with reciprocity that is not about experiencing equal parts of giving and receiving. Sharing is a way of life that contributes to emotional health by spreading hope. Sharing reminds us of what we have received. Keeping those experiences alive is a resource for people we support. This hope for self and others informs healing experience supports because sharing can be a powerful motivating force.

Trust

Most of the people who engaged in this research spoke of experiencing racism.

Participant 1 says:

I feel like as an Indigenous person...being raised in...a smaller community, you know, where there was... quite a bit of racism.

Participant 1 spoke of the importance of “genuine” and “authentic” relationships that enabled her to move ahead in life and feel supported. As a supervisor, it is important to consider the role racism plays in the role of staff with healing experience. This can be intersectional in the considerations of how the supervisor may also have experiences along with the people being served (Burke, 2018). Developing trust in a working relationship is essential to effective support.

When talking about the way she was raised, Participant 1 expressed pain in seeing people treated poorly. That pain translated to the present when providing services means being on the frontline and witnessing injustice. Reynolds (2019) and Richardson and Reynolds (2012) describe this as spiritual pain - when we are not able to practice our ethics or, in this case, ethics and worldview are not being honored. There needs to be room in the supervisory relationship, through trust, for the exploration of pain.

Witnessing injustice and connecting that to personal experiences can be difficult. There are many workplaces that limit the amount of advocacy their employees can practice for reputational purposes. Knowing these boundaries and being creative within them is a function of social justice and keeps the spirit intact (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012).

Caring for the Self

Participant 1 described the conscious and unconscious ways we take care of ourselves by describing her own experience:

I find that when I'm going to ceremony, I'm more self-reflective of... what my needs are and how I'm taking care of that. Yeah, I feel like that cultural piece for me really brings me back into like, trying to take care of... myself 'cause... that's where it all stems from is like taking care of yourself as an individual, then it kind of branches out from there as a family unit, community and so on and so forth.

She adds that when the spiritual or cultural piece is missing consciously, that it was always there. It may not have been presented in a clearly identified way. She states, “I think that the ceremony piece... helps me to kind of like reflect on my own needs and that helps me kind of like balance everything out.” For Participant 1, ensuring her own wellness remained stable involved ceremony and was a part of her identity rather than a practice applied to her life.

Participant 1 spoke of supporting staff who have different values and needs by doing regular check-ins. These include offering emotional connection and taking time to explore the ways people take care of themselves. If staff do not have strategies for their own wellness, she explores possibilities together, offering her own as a model. Setting aside specific time to ensure this connection occurs is important because it demonstrates that emotional health is just as valuable as all other aspects. Emotions can be messengers of other things going on in our life. Paying attention to our emotions and being able to explore them at work in meaningful ways helps us grow. If a staff member is struggling, emotional wellbeing can also be an indicator that something needs to change. This can open doors to conversations that may have otherwise gone unaddressed.

Visibility

There is a certain emotional stability that comes from having Indigenous culture visible in the workplace. Visibility can send a message that practices are valued and maintained through experiential opportunities. Participant 1 describes the “bigger

picture” of organizations implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action (2015). Having daily opportunities to have open conversations about culture and practice integrates Indigenous staff as people, connected to community, family, and the land. Integrating knowledge and practices into the workplace in a way that is honoring contributes to feelings of security and support.

Holistic Insight

The interconnection of the personal and professional means that lessons learned at work are likely to have applications at home. Supervisors may think they are giving concrete feedback about a particular task but it may link to a much deeper emotional struggle the staff experiences. Participant 1 talked about valuing honesty in the supervisory relationship because it connects professional growth with personal understanding. She had experienced personal insights through workplace dynamics and that was impactful.

As an example of holistic insight, a staff may struggle with having boundaries at work. Even though there may be clear guidelines about what the boundary should be, there is still a lack of follow through. As a supervisor, the issue seems clear. The staff is being asked to do something, it is in writing, and they are not completing the task. Privately, the manager addresses the issue with the staff and they have an emotional reaction. The staff shares that at home their partner is abusive and this has been a struggle. Through dialogue it becomes apparent that the role of boundaries in this person’s life transcends the directive at work. The supervisor now has holistic insight into the rationale supporting decision-making and must navigate the needs of people being served with care for the staff’s wellbeing.

Holistic insight also includes intergenerational impacts when working with Indigenous peoples. Considering these larger emotional factors when offering feedback and support ensures the staff is being seen as a whole person and that all of their experiences have value. Similar to the Buffalo teaching, seeing and honoring the whole person is an act of respect.

Not Having to Ask

People receiving supports are less likely to have to ask for what they need with healing experience staff. Someone who has not personal context for an experience may miss important details or be overly intrusive because institutions heavily rely on practicums to teach practical experience. This can create a power differential when the students, now social workers, hold the power in their role and the community member is in need of resources. Participant 1 speaks to relationship being the mitigating factor in these situations. Particularly, the social workers who had lived experience were more attuned to her needs.

Not having to ask for everything you need, especially when you are struggling, is a source of dignity. Providing this experience to staff is an extension of a respectful approach because it is anticipatory, signaling forethought and intention. In my own practice, some of the best support I have provided was when I was making an informed effort. I learned this because when I first started I would ask people what they needed, often in a time of crisis, and I would begin to feel a disconnection. They would shut down. After learning that was ineffective, I began brainstorming ideas of what could be helpful and that also led to a shutting down. What I've learned is that I wasn't attuned to what was happening for the person and I was trying to be a hero by fixing what was

happening. Participant 1 has been influential in teaching me that if I am truly listening, next steps will come from a place of connection. The person I am supporting will not have to always verbalize what they need because my ability to feel supportive is not the intention of our relationship.

The emotional aspect is the heart of our work and reflects the intentions of our relationships (Absolon, 2016). Beginning any supervisory relationship with this knowledge will support sustainable practices because they come from the heart. The heart can be a site of healing and it can lead us to grow in the ways that we need. Acknowledging who we are as emotional beings provides a depth to the supervisor and staff relationship that can be transformative, eclipsing the limitations of any workplace.

8.6 Danya Blayone

The mental aspect is often overdeveloped in decision-making. Eurocentric practices prioritize logic models that do not incorporate the spiritual, emotional, or physical aspects. For example, a former student was debriefing an incident where the staff team she was with were misgendering someone in a meeting. They correctly gendered the person in community and face-to-face. While debriefing, the student commented that the act was not hurting this person because it was not being done directly. Through discussion, we explored the importance of respecting someone's identity at all times. To not do so is an act of violence. We also talked about the idea of hurt as something our minds process if we experience something firsthand rather than contributing to spiritual and emotional hurt on a collective level. If we believe someone's dignity and identity are integrally connected, we cannot choose when they are deserving of that dignity.

Burke et al (2017) describe this as cognitive dissonance in a profession that “leaves social workers vulnerable to conflicts between their values, beliefs, and actions.” The stress caused by cognitive dissonance has impacts in the other quadrants of the Medicine Wheel and restoring balance starts when we “maintain an awareness of experiences that invoke dissonance and decrease/eliminate them whenever possible” (Burke et al, 2017). Danya Blayone and I have worked together for several years both directly and indirectly. She has considerable insight into her own lived experience and the ways practitioners balance the need for mental health with the demands of the workplace. This comes from her experiences as a child and continues to her work in the human service sector now. She shared her knowledge in the areas detailed below:

Relational Process

Getting to know someone and determining what can be expected is the relational footing for good work. This seems intuitive, however it can take work when there is healing experience and differences in race present in the relationship. Before a supervisor and supervisee can engage in a trusting and meaningful dialogue, there is relational protocol to establish. This can vary greatly depending on the people involved, however it is essential to establishing good working dynamics. Danya is skeptical of social workers because of her experiences with child welfare. She describes a particular supervisor who was white, had blonde hair, and who she “grilled,” determining her social work intentions. Building a relationship with that particular supervisor was a personal challenge and took conversations about the supervisor’s motivations before trust could be established. When asked what made the tough conversations successful, Danya shared:

The reason why ‘cause I sometimes can be very confrontational so because I already thought [she] was judging me, I was like, let’s test her and see what this

woman's about and see how judgy she can be actually be. Yeah, but then knowing like some of [her] own lived experience and things like that... and the personal things that [she] shared with me, I think it brought my guard down more easy... I think [her] honest answers... I was like, hmmm okay, I like that.

When asked about the starting point of safety with a supervisor Danya adds:

They would need to know and understand and agree that there's intergenerational trauma, that they would need to know that history of colonization, they would need to know and support Indigenous issues in order for me to trust them with my lived experience.

Not only do staff need to be acknowledged for their healing experience, it is decolonizing to say there is value in having perspectives that are derived from colonial oppression and systemic racism. Danya's relationship with the supervisor began with an agreement that this was factual and it needed to be talked about in an ongoing way.

Post-secondary Education and Lived Experience

Depending on how lived experience is discussed in the workplace, there is the potential to polarize staff with education and staff with lived experience. Some employers hire with lived experience equivalencies to an educational requirement and that can already send a message that education is prioritized, which, in the cases of accrediting bodies and funder requirements, may be the case. Danya describes her experience:

I don't have the formal education as a social worker does but I often see social workers once they come out of school, they wanna change the world, they wanna open their own group home, they wanna change the system and they don't wanna be like all the other social workers that have been there for x amount of years... I find that I have a better understanding than most social workers that... don't have the lived experience and that's a system that I can't work in because it's a system to me, that I don't find works well... I think their use of power is used in the wrong way.

For social work supervisors, awareness of the “unsettling” and contradictory nature of social work practice can contribute positively to working with staff who have healing experience (Rossiter, 2011). Staff and supervisors may have a combination of lived

experience and post-secondary education. These are not binary concepts. Playing them as opposing qualifications can be divisive and contribute to mental insecurities because staff are constantly trying to justify their work. Supervisors need to bring people together through their varied experiences rather than grouping individuals based on one or the other.

Retention

Staff retention in the human service sector can be a challenge for any team. It is important to recognize the impacts to both people accessing services and staff who have healing experience. Danya discusses constant turnover and the exhaustion of always creating new relationships in her childhood. That experience now translates to her skeptical approach to social workers in the workplace. She also references unhelpful termination behavior when people would no longer be in her life. At the time, it sometimes caused her to struggle more with relationships because people would come and go so frequently.

Danya's expression of persistence and resistance to harmful social work practice is a motivator for her desire to be in the profession. There is still a constant rub between being in an environment she finds unsettling and having to be in a settled state to do her best work. Staff stability can be difficult to ensure as a supervisor, however it is important that relationship transitions are attended to with care. Minimizing impacts to people receiving supports can be as simple as making intentional time to discuss someone's departure. Similarly, when staff members leave, creating opportunities to explore the effects on the team can help remaining staff feel more secure and valued.

Background Checks

Completing a background check is a routine part of employment in the human service sector. Agencies have varying policies regarding the procedure for how to mitigate any risk. These can range from only accepting people with no history of charges to people being welcomed specifically because of their healing experience in relation to a legal record. How these are handled has the ability to contribute to healing and cause harm depending on the process and outcome. Danya shares her experiences working in the field with an old record:

...it can be really annoying and frustrating 'cause I remember the first time, I wrote out the whole story of how my kids came into care and then they read it and it's like, no, this isn't what we needed... [we] just need to know that it's dealt with... and how you overcame it. So it's like, now that you know everything, so I felt in some way like...not judged but... there's some, I think some shame which was odd for me because it was like I don't feel shame for having my kids apprehended. I mean it sucked for sure but yeah, having to always share that, it's just annoying.

Asking people to share details of when they were interacting with systems prior to being employed can be exploitive and voyeuristic if not handled with care and respect.

Supervisors have a responsibility to mitigate risk and this can be done in a way that also acknowledges the importance of being timely to reduce anxiety. There needs to be transparency about the process and who makes decisions regarding record checks. What staff are asked and expected to share needs to be clearly communicated upfront to support appropriate boundaries regarding personal containment. The candidate may wish to consider legal implications for what they share. Until the candidate is hired, there is no contract determining terms of engagement. Personal information is governed by law and agencies should have ethical considerations that impact their risk mitigation practices.

Danya describes feeling supported with a previous supervisor:

...that was the first time that I've ever had someone actually say like, that's powerful stuff... it works for you ... it will benefit you, just kind of like how [she] always made it feel like that it's knowledge, that it's power.

There is a difference between healing experience and having a record. For example, I once wanted to hire someone with a substantial record. This person had done more healing work in their recovery than any of the currently employed staff. They also had work experience in the sector with strong references. Because of the charges, my employer at the time requested information beyond what was required to determine suitability. The candidate withdrew their application after a drawn out process that did not acknowledge the candidates qualifications, healing experience, and personal dignity.

Supervisors welcoming staff with healing experience need to recognize that working through background checks will be a regular occurrence. Supervisors stating that they hire staff with healing experience need to think critically about how they manage record checks. Even the language of “clean” record checks implies that to have a record is “dirty.” That initial interaction can determine how that person feels valued, welcomed, and honored for their knowledge.

Healing

It is likely that many people with lived experience have experienced trauma. I believe that referring to lived experience is a more respectful way of implying someone has experienced trauma. Renee Linklater states that, “[c]olonization has caused multiple injuries to Indigenous people, and therefore many Indigenous people experience trauma in a multi-traumatic context thus living in and with trauma is a common experience” (p.22). Lived experience can also be living experience as we cannot prevent traumatic

events from happening to us. Through our work or personal journeys, we can also become triggered or activated from old experiences.

It can happen that staff will struggle working in environments or with people where experiences overlap with previous trauma. Danya talks about this happening to her at an agency where it was not the family who triggered her but it was watching them have a similar experience with the child welfare system. Working with the family while they experienced similar struggles with service providers led to a deterioration in boundaries. The service providers began criticizing Danya for being involved due to her healing experience. They labeled Danya's advocacy and insight as a conflict of interest rather than seeing it as an opportunity to learn from her knowledge and support her wellbeing.

What helped Danya from a supervisory perspective was:

Just giving me the power to...I don't even wanna say power, giving me the free range to go with my gut to go with what I know from my lived experience and I knew that she would always have my back.

When asked about personal strategies, Danya shared:

I think just having to like take a step back and kind of look at everything and where that fine line is between my own personal stuff and my passion in my job 'cause I think it would have been very easy for me to cross that line, to cross boundaries so I would just always have to try and really... stop and think like what is it that's really driving me... You know, so that was like where I kind of like had to stop... The other stuff we'll have to sort out later on down the road hopefully, but ultimately she's in a good home. Yeah, that's a really big realization to have.

Through Danya's experience we can see the challenge in knowing that the family should have the best and having to manage the realization that she only has control over how she works. In the story, Danya's colleagues were criticizing her work. They suggested there was something wrong with her because she challenged their practice. A sign of support was knowing that even though she was struggling, she could still work independently

with her supervisor supporting. Danya had the capacity to navigate the situation even though she was challenged.

Supervisors need to be aware of the balance between supporting people to work through challenging situations and the harmful activation of triggers by becoming too enmeshed in the work. Critical reflections and offering suggestions without interfering can be a first step to encouraging an employee to self-adjust. If those are not received, then more formal measures may be required that include termination. Even in cases of terminating employment, there are still ways of being respectful. Processing the escalation of seriousness in an open way is important because it means that even if the employee is not able to respond with follow-through, they are aware of the breakdown. If someone's employment is terminated, it reduces the element of surprise and can even be seen as modeling a boundary. In my experience I have seen people who were terminated reapply when they are feeling well, taking responsibility for their role in the deterioration of the working relationship.

Mental Health

Supervisors hiring staff with healing experience are responsible for noticing and discussing staff wellness/unwellness. These conversations are ideally normalized throughout a workplace, however more intimate conversations can be reserved for private supervisions or check-ins. People who have healing experience may not be used to sharing their wellness with an employer in a way that is open and contributes to their wellbeing. Organizations often use being unwell as criterion to qualify or disqualify people from receiving supports. This can make sharing a vulnerable experience,

contributing to a 'double down' effect where people are less open the more unwell they become.

If people are unwell it can often come across as unusual behaviors, heightened emotions, a deterioration in job performance, or over-performance. These indicators are invitations to open a dialogue to explore where the staff is at in their mental health.

Maybe they need supports to continue doing good work, or if they are unhappy, support them to find something that will be a better fit. Taking a non-punitive, open approach at the outset will encourage a self-disclosure that will hopefully lead to a more productive outcome. Danya describes the contributing factors to her struggle in the workplace:

I hit a brick wall, there was no... support, there was a lot of discussions... without me present... it was like I had six other people against me almost versus just myself so it became just too much and I had to just walk away... on top of other co-workers that just thought with my own personal issues that were driving me and at times it probably was but I would always do my best to keep that in check.

Being excluded from discussions, not sharing information, and conflict with colleagues contributed to a deterioration for Danya. Supervisors with a good relationship can share important information as a tool to explore natural consequences to decision making.

Danya also notes how at times she was against herself. Another consideration is that people who are unwell are often self-aware and have a lot of internal struggle with self-image. Danya was already managing being hard on herself, the team only made the issue worse.

Demystifying consequences and holding boundaries are essential for mental stability. Danya discusses a helpful approach:

...there was always like that line that you didn't cross but at the same time [she] kind of pushed at it, [she] pushed that boundary a little bit further and it's like, no, I'm gonna do this because [she's] got my back and I felt like as long as [she]

had my back, that in some way I was like invincible... I knew like if I had gone too far, [she] would be like, well Danya, maybe you shouldn't have done that. I knew that there would always be consequences. I think that's why there was still that boundary... I knew that there was that room... but yeah, like if I had ever done anything that was unprofessional, I knew that I would hear it.

Providing people with autonomy is an indicator of support because it exemplifies trust. A believe that the team has an ability to resolve any concerns that are present. People learn through experience. Providing the space for exploration within clear boundaries is a prevention measure by supporting people's independence. It also allows for creativity and critical thinking in the workplace because staff are having to take the boundaries they know and act within them without a prescriptive agenda. This does not negate the need for close working relationships, rather it enables closeness by reducing power and control dynamics.

Education and Training

Agencies have a responsibility to educate and train their leadership along with frontline staff. This is often overlooked for training that only informs frontline practice. While joint education is important to communicate expectations, there are unique applications for supervisory work. Danya shares how she would train supervisors:

I would immerse them in Aboriginal culture as a start, I would sit them down with some street people because street people are very nice... they have like so much trauma and a lot of them are predominantly Indigenous unfortunately. But again, that's because of inter-generational trauma, that's because of the colonization, that's because, you know, the foster care system, the Sixties Scoop. That they have no fear of them 'cause even in my work now... I'd come on or was getting off shift and it was during shift exchange and the person coming on, he said... "I caught a cab from the coliseum." He's like, "It's too scary to walk in this neighborhood" and I'm like...I was a little miffed, I didn't say anything and maybe I should have but because the neighborhood we work in is predominantly Native, I'm like, "So you're scared of Natives, you're scared of me, my people." So I was like really upset.

Danya teaches us that we need to begin our training and understanding of one another from a place of wholeness, celebration, and strength. From there we are able to learn about structural violence and historical impacts. Then, the more we learn, the more we are able to connect over shared knowledge and relationships.

Caring for the mental aspect of our being can seem intangible and still holds stigma in the workplace. Encouraging open conversations about mental wellness for people with healing experience requires additional attention as privilege and other power dynamics can be at play, decreasing feelings of safety (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012). By recruiting people with healing experience, agencies may make assumptions that staff are already positioned to effectively utilize those experiences in service delivery. Another possibility is that even though social workers are required to be forthcoming with personal histories during the hiring process due to mandatory background checks, they may choose not to share those experiences further. The supervisor needs to respect that decision. Healing experience is something people self-identify. We should not be asking questions or making inferences without having a relationship. In all situations, the relationship between the supervisor and frontline social worker becomes imperative as the social worker determines to what extent they want to explore how their previous experiences arrive to their work.

8.7 Summary of Findings



Image 1 – Model Summary

I base my findings on the significant knowledge that was shared by the people who came forward, illuminating areas of meaningful practice. In addition to practice areas, there was overarching emphasis on the life-giving experience of Indigenous ceremonial and cultural access. *Image 1* is a summary of what each storyteller shared in

relation to the area of the Medicine Wheel represented, providing boundaries to the center. In the middle of the circle is the teaching about respect, reminding us to share who we are and be mindful of what we have to offer. We value each other as whole human beings while always working towards seeing one another unconditionally. Included in the center is the focus on healing experience rather than lived experience as a forward looking and mindful way to ensure our language reflects our intentions.

The quadrants surrounding the center are the boundaries that represent our responsibilities to ensure we are well enough to support others with healing work. For example, someone may be very unwell and though we see them unconditionally, to not provide boundaries is to enable the possibility of harm with people accessing services. Finally, the color red represents the Eastern direction where the Buffalo and the Natural Law of sharing is represented according to the teachings of my local area (Makokis, 2001).

The visual representation of the findings is a method of cohesively communicating potential areas of focus for staff and supervisors. The categories that comprise each quadrant originate from my reflections on the intention of what the storytellers shared. There were iterations that included more direct connections to what was shared, such as 'pain' to reflect what later became 'holistic insight' – a reflection on the importance of being strengths based and an example of "contextual analysis" (Kovach, 2009). The balance of looking holistically at a subject while supporting the integrity can be complicated. If I had kept the category of 'pain' it may not have captured the hope, healing, and overall resolution of how that emotion is processed for Participant 1. However, using 'holistic insight' could be seen as assumptive and unclearly correlated

to what was shared. Returning back to relationship, my history and connection with the people who shared their stories have truthfully led to these categories. Not only have they shared with me their wisdom through research, we have had the shared experience of working side-by-side for years. These relationships involve an established trust because these categories do not exist in isolation, they are living practices we encounter and work at continuously.

Chapter 9: Reflections

For employers benefitting from the many gifts that Indigenous staff have to offer, using that advantage without appropriate compensation perpetuates colonial and systemic oppression. Compensation is not only monetary - it includes emotional and psychological care because the effects of colonization impact people holistically. The social work profession has a responsibility, then, to advocate that Indigenous staff are treated appropriately as a function of our social justice mandate and as a tenet of reconciliation.

In the same way social workers are responsible for themselves before they can appropriately support people being served, the social work profession is responsible for its members before it can fairly expect best practice. Obscuring the lived experiences of social workers, especially Indigenous social workers, behind ethical regulations and practice standards denies the dignity we are called on to explore and promote. This incongruity with the social work professional body is mirrored in the workplace, perpetuating the systems we claim to problematize and advocate against.

The literature review demonstrates that emerging research on the experiences of Indigenous staff in social services begins in the 21st century, much of that being done in the past ten years (Bennett, Zubrzycki, & Bacon, 2011; Boulton, Gifford, & Potaka-Osborne, 2009; Brown & Fraehlich, 2011; Brown & Fraehlich, 2014; Burke et al., 2016; Burke, 2018; Carrière & Peacock, 2015; Hair & O'Donoghue, 2009; Nelson et al., 2015; Peacock, 2009; Reid, 2005; Reynolds, 2007; Reynolds, 2010; Reynolds, 2019; Roche et al., 2013; Scerra, 2012; Templeton & Durksen, 2014; Walmsley, 2009; Whiteside, Tsey, McCalman, Cadet-James, & Wilson, 2006). One of the purposes of this research is to connect promising supervision practices from the storytellers to a larger supervisory

framework that encourages supervisors and staff to see their work together as holistic and connected to the people being served. Having a model to inform supervisory relationships can enhance or maintain services and prevent harm by contributing to a balanced supervisory relationship.

The supervision model demonstrated by *Image 1* focuses on vision by emphasizing the goals and future work of staff while maintaining the grounding and perspective of the present. Once securing employment, it can be inviting for supervisors and staff to act complacent with daily responsibilities and have no motivation for practice and movement outside of the current position. By including elements of the healing experience each storyteller shared, I hope to demonstrate the particular and overarching factors that comprise working relationships. If our personal experiences impact our work specifically, then the responsibility we take to grow in the workplace can change our lives holistically.

Believing that our professional and personal converge requires an account for how we manage that over time, inclusive of multiple workplaces, positions, and relationships. Ultimately, a function of the model is to support people to express themselves fully in their work as a means of encouraging the people we serve to feel comfortable doing the same. Hopefully this in turn contributes to staff retention by creating appropriate flexibility. Responsibility and teamwork can stabilize workplace environments and lead to better services. In some cases, this includes recognizing that not all positions and environments are a good fit and though it may be uncomfortable, determining where we can be our best in a working context is cause for celebration.

The interconnection of coming to a research topic through work experience and then researching in the environment where I continue to work was both challenging and rewarding. The challenge was in ensuring I respected and honored the dual role of researcher and supervisor. The break in relationship with the two agencies was difficult because it challenged my intentions, process, and confidence as a new researcher. What ultimately became my learning through conversation with people who participated and my thesis supervisor was the awareness of how Indigenous identity is highly political.

Throughout my time as a supervisor I have encountered many situations where I have advocated with Indigenous colleagues and staff. This includes challenging decisions, common practices, and addressing systemic racism in the workplace. These situations created personal risk for myself and have helped me understand in greater depth the challenges Indigenous staff experience. I have practiced allyship in these situations by placing myself in a position where I can use my healing experience, power, and position to influence respectful outcomes. In one such instance, I accessed the consulting services of the Alberta College of Social Workers to confirm that the treatment I was witnessing, and implicated in, was unethical as a means to demonstrate my concerns were not personal and validate alternative actions.

Working through these situations has contributed to my own experience of cognitive dissonance. As a supervisor I have tried to balance these contexts as teachable moments for myself and those I supervise (Burke et al, 2017). It was pointed out to me early on that in my original proposal I did not provide a personal wellness strategy. Through my relationship with colleagues and through this research, I have learned in a deeper way, what wellness means to me.

A critical component of the model is the inclusion of a reflective practice regarding the concepts of transference and counter-transference between the social worker and person accessing services. Through my personal experiences I have observed instances where staff struggle with the boundary between potential benefits of sharing strategies that were supportive for them and the inherent expertise in decision-making held by the person accessing supports. For some social workers, there may also be residual healing work that has yet to be acknowledged. In those cases, there is the potential to play out previous life experiences differently as a re-doing, rather than recognize the uniqueness of the situation for the person accessing services. These complexities, if addressed appropriately, have the potential to beneficially impact everyone involved through the context of relational practice. Addressing these potentials can be done in a strengths-based way as preventative and responsive practice in the framework itself. Engaging in relationships with people who share the same vision for social work and supervision is strengthening because it allows us each to grow in self-determining ways while contributing to respect for all.

Chapter 10: Knowledge Sharing

The people who inspired and participated in this research are not alone in their knowledge of how best to be supported by supervisors and organizations, as referenced in the literature review by a growing number of published voices (Bennett, Zubrzycki, & Bacon, 2011; Boulton, Gifford, & Potaka-Osborne, 2009; Brown & Fraehlich, 2011; Brown & Fraehlich, 2014; Burke et al., 2016; Burke, 2018; Carrière & Peacock, 2015; Hair & O'Donoghue, 2009; Nelson et al., 2015; Peacock, 2009; Reid, 2005; Reynolds, 2007; Reynolds, 2010; Reynolds, 2019; Roche et al., 2013; Scerra, 2012; Templeton & Durksen, 2014; Walmsley, 2009; Whiteside, Tsey, McCalman, Cadet-James, & Wilson, 2006). This research has not created anything new; Through the work, I attempt to strengthen and inspire working relationships that benefit Indigenous social workers. Without effective methods of sharing knowledge back to the community, I cannot achieve this outcome.

The first step in sharing this knowledge is to have a closing ceremony with Elder Dr. Leona Makokis. I will extend invitations to those who were part of the opening ceremony and include additional people with whom I have developed relationships since. In this ceremony, I will share the findings and offer my own personal reflections on what I have learned and how I have changed through this experience. There was protocol I was told to follow and that will also be acknowledged and adhered to at this time. Anyone who wishes to read the full version will be sent a copy.

After the ceremony, I will coordinate with the people who have both been storytellers in the research, and have expressed interest in being involved in future presentations, to host a presentation on the process and findings. I will encourage

everyone on the invitation list to forward the opportunity to anyone they wish, making it an open call for participation and knowledge sharing. This will include the agency where the research was hosted and extend to anyone in the community.

Because the implications for this work involve the social work community specifically, I will reach out to the Alberta College of Social Workers to explore opportunities for knowledge sharing at a provincial level. This may include an application to present at the annual conference, inclusion in a regularly scheduled newsletter delivery, or a collaboration with other practitioners. In whatever this sharing looks like, I will involve people from the initial ceremony who have self-identified interest in further presentations and opportunities to present this work.

Part of the consent form included approval to include this research in published work that may include a journal article. After learning from, and building on, the work of other researchers, I would like to contribute this work to the growing body of published knowledge that acknowledges the importance of Truth and Reconciliation (2015) in an organizational and workplace context. I also have personal ambitions to pursue further education and publications would support these goals. In this effort, I would welcome any co-authorship with people who have experience with this research and would actively seek that support.

Personal practice and word-of-mouth will also play a part in how this research is shared. It is currently part of my practice to mentor social work students. Given my professional platform and the relationships I have with each of the storytellers, there is already growing interest in the findings. Through my professional work with different individuals and groups, there is already discussion regarding turning the findings into a

more formal training that can be offered accessibly. Part of this momentum is due to the fact that practices highlighted in the findings have been utilized by Indigenous professionals for many years and this work supports that knowledge by bringing it together in a focused way.

In whatever form the knowledge sharing takes, my intention is to never share it alone. This is important to note because it emphasizes the congruence between how the research topic first developed and how the findings will then be shared. It also models through the knowledge sharing process, how to be in relationship. Personal responsibility and collaboration have been major themes throughout this work. Personally, I have been given so much through this research process that the published (Baskin, 2011; Baskin, 2016b; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008) and relational teachings of reciprocity I have learned mean this work is never completed. This work is never mine to own, it is alive, it is medicine, and we are all deserving of its benefit.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

Each of the storytellers expressed a passion and deep care for people who access services and the quality of that experience. The storytellers connected their own lives to those of people accessing services particularly and expansively. Witnessing that connection and ensuring it remains helpful is a call on staff, supervisors, and regulatory bodies. How it remains helpful has been explored in this research by acknowledging the voices of prior work and the storytellers who came forward to share their experiences.

Acknowledging a person's healing work and full expression of self can determine the capacity for a supervisory relationship to grow. Spiritual connection, pragmatic practice, emotional exploration, and psychological wellbeing are the primary expressions of this as demonstrated through the Medicine Wheel and storyteller knowledge. Grounding oneself in local history and experiences lends credibility to this process because it is informed by relationships and the knowledge gained from their development. The same standards that apply to people who access services ought to apply to the ethical treatment and support of Indigenous staff with healing experience. Helping people stay and become well over the lifetime is a journey we all engage with and we have a responsibility to serve ourselves before we can best serve others.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Dear E4C Staff,

I am writing this letter to request participation from E4C in the research component of my thesis. I am currently pursuing a Master of Social Work degree through the University of Victoria and I am in the Indigenous Specialization stream. My research work is under the direct supervision of Dr. Jeannine Carrière who is a professor with the University of Victoria.

The purpose of this research is to develop an Indigenous supervision model specific to what Indigenous staff require in their roles when those staff have themselves been past service users. The rationale for this work comes from a lack of specific cultural supervision models, a need identified by my review of the literature, and my personal experience as a supervisor. Clients often benefit from working with staff who know what it is like to be a service user and staff often give back to their community by working in the same field where they once were clients. This overlap in experience means that these particular staff may require supervisory and agency supports that are unique to their context and this research hopes to explore what those supports look like. In order to conduct this research in a good way, I will be utilizing Indigenous Research methodology and am following ceremonial protocol that has been taught to me.

This research is open to all Indigenous staff, including leaders, who are not employed with the AHS Adult Transitional Housing program. If you choose to participate in this research, you will be invited to have a casual conversation with myself. In the conversation, I will ask prompting questions about what it is like to be working in the field where you were once a client with an emphasis on what supports have been helpful from a supervisory and agency perspective. The conversation will be directed by you and can be as detailed as you want it to be. There is the option of meeting more than once and if you prefer to share in a language other than English, you can provide someone you are comfortable with, or I will provide someone who can translate and the same expectation of confidentiality will apply, in addition to informed consent. With your consent, the conversation will be audio recorded and transcribed by a confidential transcription service. The transcript will then be presented back to you for clarification and approval before being used in any written form.

This research is entirely voluntary and has received ethics approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions, or would like to participate in this research, you can contact me at the private phone number and email below. If you have any concerns that this research will in any way impact your employment, please reach out to your Human Resources Advisor or the Director of Human Resources at e4c.

Thank you,

Appendix B

Research Title: Leadership Supports for Indigenous Staff with Lived Experience

Researcher: Sarah Perrett

Research Supervisor: Dr. Jeannine Carrière, University of Victoria School of Social Work

This form is a component of *informed consent* and is required of each person participating in the research. Your consent can be withdrawn at any time with no consequence and what you have shared will not be used in the research. You are welcome to ask any questions or provide any feedback about this process at any time. Please read the following information carefully.

Confidentiality:

If you choose to participate in this research, all of your information will be kept confidential. I will not disclose the names of anyone who has chosen to be part of the research, however I will let them know if there are any themes and will refer to these generally. If anyone is referred to specifically, it will be by using non-identifiable information and language. Some people may wish to use their real name and this is an option available to you.

The knowledge you share is intended to be used in my thesis and you have complete control over what is published and shared in that process. All quotations will be pre-approved by you for accuracy and clarity. There may be interest in this subject area by other agencies and publications but it is up to you if your information is shared beyond the scope of this project.

All recordings and transcriptions will be kept confidential.

This research has been approved by the University of Victoria Ethics Approval Board and the community leaders of E4C. I am also accountable to my Thesis Supervisor, Dr. Jeannine Carrière, who is a professor with the University of Victoria.

Potential Risks:

Because we will be talking about past experiences, you may find yourself needing additional support either before, during, or after we meet. I will be available to refer you to a helping resource and you can end our meeting at any time if you find yourself getting uncomfortable.

This information is meant to support your local community by illuminating an underdeveloped subject area. Your lived experience is valuable and already serves the community where you work and I am grateful for your openness to furthering the impact.

Consent:

I have read the Letter of Recruitment and understand the purpose of this research

Yes _____

No _____

I know how to contact the researcher

Yes _____

No _____

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback

Yes _____

No _____

I give permission to be audio recorded

Yes _____

No _____

I give permission to have my audio recording transcribed

Yes _____

No _____

I wish to review my transcript prior to being used in this research

Yes _____

No _____

Preferred Contact Information:

I give permission for my transcript to be used in future work relating to this research topic

Yes _____

No _____

I wish to remain anonymous

Yes _____

No _____

If yes, what name or initials would you prefer when being referenced?

—

Signature

Printed Name

Date

Signing this form indicates that you understand the information provided to you describing what it means to participate in this research and that you agree to be a research participant. It also indicates that you understand that this research is for a graduate degree and will be used in a document referred to as a thesis.

Appendix C

Research Title: Leadership Supports for Indigenous Staff with Lived Experience

Researcher: Sarah Perrett

Research Supervisor: Dr. Jeannine Carrière, University of Victoria School of Social Work

This form is a component of *informed consent* and is required of each person participating in the research. Your consent can be withdrawn at any time without consequence and what you have shared will not be used in the research. You are welcome to ask any questions or provide any feedback about this process at any time. Please read the following information carefully.

Confidentiality:

If you choose to participate in this research, all of your information will be kept confidential. I will not disclose the names of anyone who has chosen to be part of the research, however I will let them know if there are any themes and will refer to these generally. If anyone is referred to specifically, it will be by using non-identifiable information and language. Some people may wish to use their real name and this is an option available to you.

The knowledge you share is intended to be used in my thesis and you have complete control over what is published and shared in that process. All quotations will be pre-approved by you for accuracy and clarity. There may be interest in this subject area by other agencies and publications but it is up to you if your information is shared beyond the scope of this project. Your employment, standing, and relationship with E4C will not be affected if you choose or decline to participate in this research.

All recordings and transcriptions will be kept confidential.

This research has been approved by the University of Victoria Ethics Approval Board and the community leaders of E4C. I am also accountable to my Thesis Supervisor, Dr. Jeannine Carrière, who is a professor with the University of Victoria.

Potential Risks:

Participating in this research as someone employed with the Inner Ways program means there is a heightened level of accountability and responsibility on my part as the researcher and you as the participant. Because of our pre-existing relationship, there are some increased risks that may impact you.

1. There is the potential to feel embarrassed if you choose to share information I may not already know about you or if you share information that implies you are dissatisfied with your employer or your employer's approach.

2. Sharing information in a research context inherently invites an institutional context to our relationship and invokes a colonial dynamic that may impact our ability to connect relationally and/or impact our relationship in the future.
3. It may be perceived that because of our joint involvement in Inner Ways this research is somehow less credible which may lead to social risk if you have participated. It could also be stigmatizing if you share your lived experience and others in the agency devalue this perspective and/or approach.
4. You may feel that your employment or performance evaluations are in jeopardy depending on the information you share. This may result in over/under or distorted sharing based on your concerns.

This is voluntary research that has taken all of these risks into account relationally in how I will conduct myself in the research process and in the signed portion below. Because we will be talking about past experiences, you may find yourself needing additional support either before, during, or after we meet. I will be available to refer you to a helping resource and you can end our meeting at any time if you find yourself getting uncomfortable.

This information is meant to support your local community by illuminating an underdeveloped subject area. Your lived experience is valuable and already serves the community where you work and I am grateful for your openness to furthering the impact.

Consent:

I have read the Letter of Recruitment and understand the purpose of this research including the development of a thesis and e4c training.

Yes _____

No _____

I know how to contact the researcher.

Yes _____

No _____

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback.

Yes _____

No _____

I understand that my employment with e4c is not impacted by my involvement in this research and anything I share cannot be shared with my employer or used in performance evaluations.

Yes _____

No _____

I know how to contact the CEO of e4c and/or the Human Research Ethics Board if I have concerns that the researcher is acting unethically and my employment is being impacted by my involvement.

Yes _____

No _____

I understand that this is a formal research process and the relationship I currently share with the researcher may manifest differently in this context.

Yes _____

No _____

I understand that there may be social risk by involving myself in research initiated by my program manager and that I have control over what I share about the process and experience of participating.

Yes _____ No _____

My participation in this research is voluntary and I was not recruited by the researcher.

Yes _____ No _____

I give permission to be audio recorded.

Yes _____ No _____

I give permission to have my audio recording transcribed.

Yes _____ No _____

I wish to review my transcript prior to being used in this research.

Yes _____ No _____ Preferred Contact Information:

I give permission for excerpts of my transcript to be used in future work relating to this research topic including a journal article.

Yes _____ No _____

I wish to remain anonymous.

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, what name or initials would you prefer when being referenced?

If a translator is present, I permit them to translate what I share to the best of their ability.

Yes _____ No _____

As the translator, I agree to translate what I hear to the best of my ability and keep all information confidential.

Yes (print & sign) _____ No (print & sign) _____

Signature

Printed Name

Date

Signing this form indicates that you understand the information provided to you describing what it means to participate in this research and that you agree to be a research participant. It also indicates that you understand that this research is for a graduate degree and will be used in a document referred to as a thesis.

Appendix D

Conversation Questions:

1. If you feel comfortable, can you describe what your experience was like as a service user?
 - a. What type of services did you rely on?
 - b. Did you have multiple workers that you had to communicate with or did you have mainly one?
 - c. What can you remember about their approaches in working with you?
 - d. Out of your experiences accessing services, what was sometimes challenging or frustrating? What was helpful?
 - e. I imagine it may have been a challenging or difficult time when you needed to rely on services, what did you do to take care of yourself during this time?
2. Can you describe what was going on for you when you stopped accessing services?
 - a. How was the transition from accessing services to no longer being a service user?
 - b. What was different for you once you stopped accessing services?
 - c. Can you describe the process (be it the time frame or decision-making) that led to your decision to become a service provider?
 - d. What lessons did you take away from being a service user?
 - e. How do you use your experiences as a service user in the work you do?
3. How would you define your approach to your work?
 - a. Do you think your experience as a service user has influenced your approach to your work? (whether yes or no) How so?
 - b. Given that you have your own personal experience in understanding service access, have you been motivated to share some of your own experience?
 - c. What do you take into consideration when sharing your personal experience? (if you have shared)
 - d. What was it like sharing your own experiences and would you continue to do so if the opportunity came up in future work?
4. Do you think your agency/supervisor has acknowledged the potential impact of your personal experience as a service user on your current work?
 - a. Do you want that experience to be honored as a part of what you bring to your work? In what ways?
 - b. What kind of agency support do you think is important for yourself?
 - c. What kind of supervisory support do you think is important for yourself?
 - d. Given that not all of your colleagues have lived experience as a service user, what considerations are helpful when looking at how to support a person with lived experience?
 - e. What supports do you hope to have in the future?
 - f. How has culture played a role in what support you have received?
 - g. How does culture play a role in what support you would like to receive?
5. Do you have any comments you wish to add at this time?