

Stitching Ourselves Back Together: Urban Indigenous Women's Experience of  
Reconnecting with Identity Through Beadwork.

By

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how urban Indigenous women experience reconnections to cultural identity when they take up the practice of traditional beadwork. A beading methodology was used to explore the experiences of five urban Indigenous women in Winnipeg. Within this methodology, stories and conversations about beadwork are used as a way to gather and share knowledge in research. Participants were asked to share their experience of identity reconnections through beadwork stories. The major elements of this beading methodology and its underlying theoretical, epistemological and ontological roots are told through the story of the beaded medicine bags that were created for and gifted to each participant for the knowledge they contributed to this research. The author's own beaded medicine bag is also used as a framework for a thematic analysis and discussion of the research findings. The themes identified through this analysis suggest beading as a multi-faceted and action-oriented approach that facilitates processes of journeying, remembering, relationships, asserting the self and healing that urban Indigenous women experience through their engagement with this practice. This thesis concludes by highlighting some of the important implications of beading as an Indigenous way of knowing, being and doing in social work practice and research to promote decolonization, resiliency, wellness and healing in our work with Indigenous communities.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmothers.

To my maternal grandmother Patricia Ives Larence.

And to my Kookum, Phyllis Margaret Nabess.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Beading, involving the stringing of beads or sewing of beads onto hide or fabric, is widely recognized in the lands currently known as Canada as a form of Indigenous cultural expression and is appreciated for its aesthetic or artistic qualities. Traditionally, beading is a practice through which knowledge passes, bonds are strengthened, and spiritual connections are established and although not gendered, it is a practice most commonly undertaken by Indigenous women (Farrell Racette, 2008; Belcourt, 2010; Ray, 2016; Gray, 2017). For many Indigenous beadworkers, the practice of beading moves beyond merely an artistic endeavor. It is a distinct way of knowing, being and doing. The finished, beaded piece is intimately connected to the one who made it and embodies the knowledge and experience of its creator.

With the onset of colonization, beaded objects gained material value as crafts, souvenirs or art that were coveted by collectors and art connoisseurs among European settlers (Gray, 2017; Farrell Racette, 2008). These forms of appropriation devalued and marginalized beading as a knowledge system. Beading became marginalized further when the Canadian government, recognizing beadwork as a symbol of Indigenous cultures and identity, banned the wearing and use of beaded items and thus, the practice of beading itself, through the *Indian Act* (Farrell Racette, 2017). As a result, many Indigenous women became disconnected from this way of knowing and were unable to pass this knowledge to subsequent generations. All Indigenous women have experienced loss or trauma on some level through the process of colonization and, as a result, must work at making meaning of their identities (Anderson, 2000). Identity then becomes a crucial concept as part of personal decolonization and healing. Engaging with beading practices offers a way for Indigenous women to heal, reclaim, reconnect and reaffirm their cultural identity and ways of knowing in response to the intergenerational legacy of colonization.

In this thesis, I will be discussing beadwork as a means for reconnection and decolonization, as described in my research intentions which follow.

### **Research Intentions**

There are two overarching goals of this research study. The first is to develop a deeper understanding of how Indigenous women experience healing and reconnections with identity when they take up the practice of traditional beadwork. Research has noted to varying degrees, the identity connections and healing experienced by Indigenous women when they engage with the practice of beading (Belcourt, 2010; Hanson & Griffith, 2016; Ray, 2016; Gray, 2017; Bourgeois, 2018). This research will explore the question: How do urban Indigenous women experience reconnections to identity when beading practices become a part of their lives? An Indigenous beading methodology was used to explore the perspectives and experiences of five urban Indigenous women in Winnipeg. Within this methodology, stories and conversations about beadwork were used as a method to gather and share knowledge from participants. Each participant was asked to share her experience through beadwork stories. The practice of beading shares a strong relationship with memory, healing, knowledge and story (Anderson, 2016; Hanson & Griffiths, 2016; Ray, 2016, Bourgeois, 2018); a beading methodology acknowledges this important connection. The intent of this research is to draw attention to the resiliency, transformative change and healing experienced by Indigenous women rather than focusing solely on the impact of historical, colonial and patriarchal oppressions on their lives.

The second purpose of this study is to honour and create space for the inclusion of Indigenous beading knowledges within the realm of social work. Beading has the potential to offer social work practitioners a way of knowing and exploring healing with Indigenous clients that is rooted within Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. Beading knowledges have also

been historically suppressed and marginalized through colonization. The inclusion of beading as a way of knowing, being and doing within social work may contribute to wider social justice aims of anti-oppression and decolonization within practice and research and bring these knowledges out of the margins.

I believe knowledge is derived from all relationships. It is with this foundational understanding that I approach my own practice of beading as a relationship, through which I have been able to re-establish connections to knowledge and ways of being lost through colonization and gain greater insight into knowing myself as an Indigenous woman. My personal location is embedded not only in my research intentions, but also in my understanding of the potential and power of beading as a way of knowing, being and doing in research and social work. It is therefore imperative that I begin by offering my own beading story as it is intertwined within this research.

### **Kookum's Beaded Necklace**

Personal location is part of ethical accountability within Indigenous research methodologies as it reveals the cultural, political and social context of the researcher, and makes “a claim about who you are and where you come from, your investment and your intent” (Absolon & Willett, 2005, p.112). My story takes place in the urban context of Winnipeg where I was born and have lived my whole life and where I spent the last 11 years working as a social worker. My Metis family name is Larence which is my maternal grandfather's name that I carried with me until I was married. My grandfather's family are descended from the Red River Metis in Manitoba. I did not grow up immersed in Metis culture but was lucky to be close to my maternal grandparents. Through them, I had the opportunity to establish a relationship with and love for land and a creative vision. My grandfather was a farmer and beekeeper and I had more

opportunities than many inner-city kids to go out and be on the land with my grandparents. I have a deep connection to the prairies which have become an important part of my being. My maternal grandmother did a lot of crochet, sewing and craft projects. She has a very creative way of being. I have many things in my possession that she has made and gifted to me over the years. Although I never learned to machine sew or crochet, I believe I inherited her creativity and ability to vision. I might not have this relationship with land, or this ability to vision and create if I was not connected to my maternal grandparents. This gives me some hope that not all traditional teachings have been lost to me. My relationship with my maternal grandparents forms part of the foundation that shapes who I am. Through my relationship with them, I have come to recognize and respect the important role they played in my life, in shaping my values, worldviews and ways of being in the world. They are only part of my story though.

Through my father's bloodline I am registered to Tatanka Najin, Standing Buffalo First Nation, a Dakota Sioux community in southern Saskatchewan that I had never been to until just recently. My paternal grandmother, my Kookum, registered some of her children in that community but was not raised there. She comes from a tiny Saskatchewan community called Day Star. I know some of my paternal relatives had Cree and Metis heritage but am unsure which ancestors the Dakota-Sioux connections come from. My paternal grandfather spoke several Indigenous languages, but I am also unsure if Tatanka Najin is the community he actually came from. There is much I don't know about the paternal side of my ancestry and identity. My parents split up before I was a year old. I have never met my father, my Kookum, or anyone on the paternal side of my family. I grew up disconnected from them. I now understand that these disconnections are directly related to the ongoing and generational impacts of colonization and the residential schools on all of us. This was not only a physical disconnection, but a

disconnection from culture, teachings, language and knowledge. I did not always understand it this way, but it is what I have come to know through my search to connect with and know my Indigenous identity and through education and my own personal healing journey. There is still grief over the relationships and knowledges that have been disrupted but I found myself seeking out ways to reaffirm my identity as an Indigenous woman, reconnect with my ancestors and decolonize my ways of knowing, being and doing. Beading came into my life as part of this search and through my Kookum's beaded necklace. As I began to take up this practice, I came to see it as a way to begin to accomplish this.

My Kookum, my paternal grandmother, was a beadwork practitioner who passed into the spirit world before I had a chance to know her. I was very fortunate to be gifted a piece of her beadwork. My mother saw my Kookum many years ago at a craft sale where she was selling her beadwork. My Kookum hadn't seen me since I was a baby. She asked my mother about me and gave her a rope-style beaded necklace made with pearlescent blue and white beads to gift to me. When my mother gifted this beadwork to me, she told me about her encounter at the craft sale and encouraged me to go back and meet my Kookum. She shared memories of my Kookum caring for me as an infant, rocking me in a traditional baby hammock, where I was securely asleep inside, and she was quietly beading next to me. She shared memories of who my Kookum was as a mother and grandmother. This was among the first of any memories or stories I had ever heard about my Kookum, and they are forever connected to this piece of beadwork. I went back to the craft sale the next day, hoping to find and meet her, but when I arrived, she wasn't there. My Kookum passed away in 2012. I still have her beaded necklace. It is the only tangible connection I have to her.

Years later, I decided to take up the practice of beading. I came into this practice with the intention of connecting with my culture, my ancestors, and myself. I am self-taught. I had no one to teach me. I am still not completely sure where the urge to learn came from, but I found the skill came naturally and quickly progressed. I suspect my grandmothers had a hand in this in some way. I believe the ability to bead is a gift from them both that I have always carried inside of me, within my blood. It is knowledge I already had that was waiting to be reconnected with and uncovered. My very first beadwork project was a pair of beaded moccasins gifted to my only living grandmother on her eightieth birthday. I knew my first project would be gifted to her and would be created with the intent of honouring the knowledge and wisdom she had imparted on me, but also to honour the important role of grandparents in cultural continuity and the sharing of Indigenous knowledges, especially as it relates to identity. I was honestly surprised how well the moccasins turned out and at how well the beadwork held together, even when I see them now nearly four years later. My beadwork had the strength to hold its own and had given me the power to assert pride and confidence in my Indigenous self and Indigenous knowledges. This led me to consider how beading knowledge also has the strength to stand on its own as a legitimate way of knowing. I have come to know that beading and the sharing of knowledge through beadwork is part of my place and purpose within culture as an Indigenous woman. I think that is something my Kookum would have wanted me to know, and I believe that is why her beadwork came to me. Acknowledging this important connection has been essential to my healing. It has given me the confidence to not only connect with and express my Indigenous identity, but also to assert my knowledge, values, worldview and experience through my beadwork and the stories and memories connected to it. My beading story is stitched into the fabric of each and every beaded piece I create.

Through beadwork, I believe I can still be connected to my Kookum and the knowledges she had to share. Through beadwork, there is space to grow, to know and understand who we are, where we come from, and to be able to articulate and assert this. This short poem by Spotted Fawn (2015) offers some insight:

Through beadwork  
I am connecting to my ancestors, the act of beading brings medicine to my soul.  
I travel through space and time. I feel the love among those who were on earth before me.  
Decolonizing one bead at a time.

My journey to reconnect has been guided by beadwork in unexpected ways. This journey is embedded within and woven throughout this research. It has nurtured a desire to connect with and share this amazing ancestral gift with other Indigenous women, and to learn about how beadwork has guided them along on their own journeys to reconnect.

### **Question of Interest**

The question I set out to explore through this research was: How do urban Indigenous women experience reconnections to identity when beading practices become a part of their lives? My aim was to consider the ways in which beading supports the healing, reclaiming and decolonizing of identity among Indigenous women. To maintain scope and feasibility, the research question was explored in relation to the experiences of urban Indigenous women living in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This choice was informed by my geographical location and my own personal and social work experience within the urban context of Winnipeg, where disconnection from Indigenous culture and community is an experience shared by many. The question of how Indigenous women experience reconnections to identity was approached using a beading methodology and explored through beadwork stories. Stories and conversations about beadwork have the potential to uncover and transmit meaning that is specific and unique to the individual

(Bourgeois, 2018; Ray, 2016). Beading is a way to tell a story and convey knowledge of our embodied, wholistic and deeply personal experience of healing and identity.

## **Chapter Two: Unravelling the Stitches: The Context of Beadwork**

### **Literature Review**

The intent of this research is to develop a deeper understanding of how Indigenous women experience reconnections to identity through their engagement with beading practices. A cursory review of the literature pertaining to Indigenous beadwork revealed this tradition exists among many diverse Indigenous nations across the globe. For the purpose of this review, sources were examined specific to beadwork traditions among North American Indigenous peoples. My search for relevant literature was conducted across a variety online databases specific to publications in social sciences, social work, education, anthropology, health and art history using a combination of search terms that included: beadwork, beading, traditional, beadworking, native, Aboriginal, Indigenous, Indian, Metis, methods, methodology, storytelling, oral tradition, knowledge creation, epistemology, pedagogy, beadwork stories, decolonization, resurgence, reclaiming, worldview, Indigenous women, art therapy, social work, identity, trauma and healing. Much of the research that is specific to the tradition of North American Indigenous beadwork is focused in the area of art history and anthropological study. Since much of the social science literature was based upon the premise of beading as an artistic practice, research pertaining to creative arts and healing within Indigenous contexts was explored. Attention was paid to uncovering literature written from Indigenous perspectives and relating specifically to the practice of beading. Consideration was also given to research that explored beading as a method of inquiry within Indigenous research contexts and revealed that research within this area is very limited. Four themes were identified across this literature review and will be discussed in more detail in the sections that follow. They include: colonial beads, creative art and Indigenous healing, beading research methods and beading epistemology.

## Colonial Beads

The historical and ethnographic literature suggests the practice of beading existed prior to European contact, where hair, quills, bone, stone, hoof, seeds, shells and other things found within nature and on the land were used to adorn personal or ceremonial items (Gray, 2017; Belcourt, 2010; Hill, 2003). Some of these items are still used in traditional beadwork today. Beadwork was not only for embellishment. The styles, motifs and materials often reflected social, spiritual, political, ceremonial or personal relevance (Belcourt, 2010, Gray, 2017). European beads were introduced by trade to an already existing tradition of beading. The important role of Indigenous women in the process of incorporating and Indigenizing European trade goods into Indigenous life was highlighted by Sherry Farrell Racette (2008), a Metis art historian. She says trade goods, such as beads and wool cloth, were Indigenized through naming and language which “served as the means of transferring older meanings on to new forms” (p.71). She also suggests that through this process of Indigenization, these trade goods have become incorporated to the point where they are now considered a part of traditional Indigenous art and culture. Farrell Racette (2008) noted these items reflect the important cultural work of our grandmothers, who were tasked with incorporating knowledges from these two worlds into the cultural and artistic forms we recognize today. As a visual and therefore, easily identifiable expression of Indigeneity and resiliency, beaded items were suppressed within the residential schools and were among the items targeted through the cultural bans implemented under the *Indian Act* in Canada until 1951 (Gray, 2017; Farrell Racette, 2017; Prete, 2019). The banning of these items not only disrupted the identities of Indigenous people, but also the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and culture, the important work of our grandmothers that Farrell Racette (2008) articulates.

Indigenous beadwork is frequently framed as a traditional form of art and creative expression, where the aesthetics of beadwork are considered a symbolic expression of the cultural knowledge, experience, and identity of the artist (Robertson, 2017; Farrell Racette, 2017; Belcourt, 2010; Farrell Racette, 2008). The more recent Indigenous art history literature describes a resurgence in the use of traditional forms of art by contemporary artists to express the past and present impacts of colonization on Indigenous communities (Farrell Racette, 2017; Robertson, 2017; Anderson, 2016). A powerful example are the beaded moccasin tops in the *Walking with Our Sisters* art project created by Metis artist Christi Belcourt. The project was created in response to the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. The choice of beads within this project speaks to the cultural loss of Indigenous women to Indigenous communities and thus, the loss of generational knowledges that women carry, which is essential for communities to be sustained (Anderson, 2016). The inclusion of beadwork also “demonstrates the transformational power of beading” (Robertson, 2017, p.18). The participants who created the beadwork for this art exhibit were able to share stories, gain a sense of connectedness, rebuild cultural ties, mourn, and heal through the process of creating beadwork (Anderson, 2016). Many participants were families and loved ones of the missing and murdered who were able to use beadwork to share an experience that would otherwise be difficult to express freely through words alone. *Walking with Our Sisters* sets a powerful example of the potential beadwork has in raising awareness, creating dialogue and inspiring social action around issues of importance to Indigenous communities. Within the contemporary art history literature emerged an important theme of reclaiming traditional forms of artistic and cultural expression, and through this process, healing.

## **Creative Art and Indigenous Healing**

The connection between creative and artistic processes and healing has also been explored within the social science literature. The nature of Indigenous healing within this research is varied and is inclusive of healing in relation to holistic health and wellness, personal growth and self-esteem, and historical trauma resulting from residential school involvement (de Leeuw & Muirhead, 2012; Coholic, Cote-Meek & Recollet, 2012; Archibald & Dewar, 2010). The healing benefits that are inherent within creative and artistic activities are noted by Archibald and Dewar (2010), who propose that when these activities include aspects of traditional art and culture, there are additional benefits to Indigenous people. The ability of creative arts to foster reconnections with Indigenous identity is also noted by Coholic et al. (2012), who say that art-based processes can support Indigenous women to strengthen identity by contributing to the development of greater self-esteem, self-awareness and confidence, which in turn, fosters resilience in the face of a shared experience of colonial oppression.

While these studies have emphasized the significance of the relationship between creative arts and Indigenous healing, it is important to note that the use of creative art is within a certain context – that of the formal structure of a healing-based program or therapy. Archibald and Dewar (2010) based their findings on a larger study they co-authored as part of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) in which they evaluated the use of creative arts within 104 AHF-funded projects. One of their conclusions was that “the arts were viewed as deepening, supporting, and enhancing the healing process” (p.6). It is important to note that their findings are based largely upon the perspectives and responses from service practitioners, facilitators, therapists and others who delivered mental health and trauma-related healing initiatives under the umbrella of the AHF.

Building upon these findings Coholic et al. (2012) determined there was little research specific to the use of creative arts-based methods with Indigenous women. The focal point of their research was arts-based group methods. Their research explored the experiences of 16 urban Indigenous women involved in three separate groups that used a mixture of western and Indigenous creative arts. The authors brought a holistic, strengths-based, social work perspective to their analysis, focusing on the experiences of resilience in response to what they saw as internalized oppression resulting from the ongoing process of colonization. Within this urban context, their research was inclusive of status, non-status, Metis and Inuit women and the authors also noted that many of the women shared an experience of disconnection from their home communities. Participants reportedly felt that engagement with creative processes within the group helped them to build connections with Indigenous culture and identity. Although both Coholic et al. (2012) and Archibald and Dewar (2010) position the creative arts in relation to Indigenous healing, neither study explores the practice of beading specifically within their research.

### **Beading Research Methods**

The practice of beading has been used as a method within research studies that do not have a specific focus on Indigenous healing. Within these studies, the process of engaging in beadwork and the participant's experience of that process becomes a way to gather information, make meaning, and provide context. In these studies, the emphasis is on the practice or process of beading, not necessarily the completed beadwork project itself.

In their ethnographic study of experiences within domestic spaces, Hadjiyanni and Helle (2010) interviewed 13 Ojibwe men and women from a community in Minnesota to gain a better understanding of the material and immaterial connections established through their engagement

with craft-making practices within the home; these practices were inclusive of Ojibwe beadwork. Significant to their research was an emphasis on the connective abilities of beadwork practices and the potential for connections to the immaterial or spiritual realms as part of the larger, wholistic process of connecting with cultural identity. Although Hadjiyanni and Helle's (2010) study acknowledged the wholistic connections inherent within beadwork, their research was written from an architectural and design perspective that focused on how the quality of domestic space within the home, either enhanced or suppressed crafting activities such as beadwork.

Beading has also been used as a method of inquiry positioned alongside Indigenous storytelling in research specific to Indigenous women (Hanson & Griffith, 2016; Ray, 2016, Bourgeois, 2018). Beading is explored as a medium through which Indigenous women experience intergenerational learning and the transmission of cultural knowledge in a study by Hanson and Griffith (2016), who also explore the practice of weaving among Mapuche women in Chile within this same study. Their study is interdisciplinary, and community and arts-based, informed by an Indigenous research methodology that places emphasis on the contextualized knowledge embedded within the practices and stories of beadwork. Hanson and Griffith (2016) used a mixed method of focus groups, interviews and circles, through which Indigenous women shared experiences of their beading (or weaving) practices. The groups created space for the women to use their beading as a medium to “draw out memories and stories of intergenerational learning” (Hanson & Griffith, 2016, p.225). The authors do not explicitly identify themselves as beadwork practitioners, which makes Ray's (2016) research unique. She personally locates stories, knowledge and teachings from her own beading practice into her discussion of beading as a method of inquiry in research. Emphasis is also placed by Ray on the process and practice of beadwork within her study. While Hanson and Griffith (2016) describe their use of beading as

a method within an arts-based research approach, Ray (2016) says it is a distinct Indigenous women's method of inquiry within research. It is also important to note that in the studies identified where beading is used as a method (such as Hadjiyanni & Helle, 2012; Hanson & Griffith, 2016; Ray, 2016, Bourgeois, 2018), although cultural identity was not the specific area of inquiry, each author noted, to varying degrees, the connections to Indigenous identity experienced by participants through their engagement with beading practices.

### **Beading as Epistemology**

The visual and aesthetic properties of traditional beadwork have led to a common association of this practice within the realm of "art". This conceptualization is reflected within the body of fine art and historical literature as well as the creative art therapy literature included within this review, where beading is included with other traditional and non-traditional arts such as drawing, singing, acting, dancing, drumming, painting, carving and so on (Archibald & Dewar, 2010; de Leeuw & Muirhead, 2012). More recently, there has also been a body of emerging literature from Indigenous scholars contesting beading as "art". These scholars have presented arguments within the literature that the practice of beading is an historically marginalized Indigenous women's knowledge (Ray, 2016) and distinct Indigenous epistemology (Bourgeois, 2018).

In a case study that draws upon the subjective, expert experience and knowledge of a single Anishinaabe beadwork practitioner, Bourgeois (2018) positions beading as an epistemology rather than as an artistic practice. He says the practice of beading "provides insight into each practitioner's worldview, and also allows us to see how this worldview connects them to wider spheres of Indigenous knowledge and experience" (p.54). While the study acknowledges the limitations of using only a single participant, key to its analysis is that

knowledge created through this practice is unique, specific to the individual, and deeply connected to ancestors and cultural identity.

A beading research methodology that is grounded in Indigenous worldviews is articulated by Ray (2016), who presents beading as a legitimate knowledge system and critiques the colonial, hierarchal, and patriarchal constructions of Indigenous women's knowledges as non-knowledges. Ray, who is an Anishinaabe woman, also draws upon her knowledge as a beadwork practitioner, offering depth and insight into the unique, individual and spiritual nature of knowledge that is present within this practice which Bourgeois (2018) also articulates. Beading knowledges are extended into the realm of academic research by Ray (2016) who proposes that by asserting beading knowledges within research, beading provides "an outlet to collect, understand, and convey knowledges in a way that is meaningful and relevant within an Anishinaabe worldview and aligned with concepts of sovereignty and community wellness" (p.376). By reclaiming beading knowledges and incorporating them into our everyday lives and the ways we go about doing research, Ray (2016) asserts that values, identity, cultural ways of knowing, and relationships disrupted by the generational impacts of colonization may be healed and restored. This contributes to Indigenous resurgence and the demarginalization and decolonization of beading as a way of knowing and researching. Studies by Bourgeois (2018) and Ray (2016) have drawn attention to understanding the epistemological nature inherent within the practice of beading and have emphasized an understanding of beading practices as a distinct, Indigenous women's knowledge system and method of inquiry within academic research. These studies have created space for the inclusion of beading as an Indigenous way of knowing, being and pursuing research with Indigenous women.

## Summary

Finally, the Indigenous-specific creative art literature suggests a connection between artistic processes and experiences of healing; connections between these processes and Indigenous identity are also noted. Coholic et al. (2012) note the gap in research relating to Indigenous women's experience with arts-based healing and highlight the urban context where Indigenous women expressed feeling cultural disconnections – leaving room to explore the experiences of urban Indigenous women further. Ray (2016) suggests beading “becomes a part of your life” (p. 364) situating the practice outside the realm of art therapy, raising further questions about the experiences of Indigenous women outside this formal structure. Drawing on findings in these studies, this research seeks to use the practice of beading as a method of inquiry in developing a deeper understanding of urban Indigenous women's experiences of connections to identity.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

To decolonize knowledges within research, our attention must be turned to Indigenous knowledges as our theoretical frameworks. In this research, Indigenous research methods and a decolonization theoretical framework were used to guide my inquiry through a beading methodology. A beading methodology decolonizes and Indigenizes the research approach because colonized knowledges cannot be dismantled with colonial methodologies (Absolon, 2011). A beading methodology has its own theoretical orientation to knowledge. Rooted within Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, it is based on a relational understanding of the role of beading in establishing connections to cultural knowledge (Ray, 2016). This relationship is established through engaging in the practice of beading in which meaning is created on wholistic and subjective levels. Utilizing a beading methodology then offers a distinct, Indigenous approach to understanding the subjective experiences of Indigenous women that upholds and centers Indigenous worldviews and knowledges within its foundations.

Critical Indigenous, anti-oppressive and feminist perspectives are brought into this research approach through the positioning of beading as a distinct Indigenous women's knowledge that has been marginalized through colonization. A beading methodology acknowledges the history of colonial and patriarchal oppression that has subjugated Indigenous women's ways of knowing and being (Ray, 2016). Such a methodology upholds feminist approaches to research through creating a consciousness of the diverse experiences and knowledge of women and incorporating women's lived experiences into the knowledge building process (Hesse-Biber, Leavy & Yaiser, 2004). As such, a beading methodology is an approach that can contribute to developing a deeper understanding of Indigenous women's healing and

identity in response to the influence of patriarchal and colonial oppressions on their ways of knowing, being and doing.

### **Beading Methodology**

My personal journey, my relationship with beading and my emerging awareness of the colonial influence on Indigenous knowledges led to my choice of a beading methodology in this research. When I began my MSW program in 2016, I had been beading for about a year and was becoming more confident, insightful and intentional in my work. My perspective on this practice was always changing and evolving as I delved deeper into my relationship with beading. This coincided with my studies around Indigenous knowledges and methodologies as I moved through my MSW program. Teachings from Wilson (2008), Kovach (2009) and Absolon (2011) drew my attention to the privileging of dominant, western-based research and the colonizing and oppression of Indigenous knowledges. Centering Indigenous knowledges, worldviews, values and methodologies in my own research became essential. I gained an appreciation for storytelling in research and the potential of beadwork stories as a method of inquiry was something that really piqued my interest when I thought about how I would undertake this study. I was intrigued by the emerging scholarship from Ray (2016), Bourgeois (2018) and Hanson and Griffiths (2016) that validated what I had experienced through my own practice and what I believed about beading as a way of knowing. Although I had only these few sources to draw upon, I put forth a beading methodology within my research proposal that was grounded in Indigenous worldviews and approaches to research. I articulated its theoretical frameworks and epistemological underpinnings and described how I would gather knowledge through stories and conversations about beadwork. I considered relational accountability and how I would honour and demonstrate respect for the knowledges shared. I had also made a commitment in my

proposal to prepare beadwork to gift to my participants for their contribution. Although I initially had no definitive idea about what this beadwork would look like or what story it would tell, what I did know was that I wanted it to be meaningful to the research and to the participants in some way.

I decided this beadwork would be created to not only convey my knowledge and the way I think about knowledge within beadwork, but also my relationship to beadwork, and how I understood beading as a way of doing research alongside Indigenous peoples. The story of the beading methodology used in this research is connected to the beaded medicine bags I created and gifted to each of the Indigenous women who participated (Figure 1). The story of the beaded



*Figure 1.* Beaded medicine bags. Winnipeg, Manitoba December 8, 2018.

medicine bags is interwoven throughout this methodology chapter as it reflects some of the key elements of this beading methodology. I believe it is also important to note that although I acknowledge how intimately my own life and experience are woven within this methodology, I cannot claim it as my own. What I can offer is one of potentially many ways of undertaking a beading methodology in research alongside Indigenous people. Beading has the quality of being

distinct and unique. A beading methodology also holds this quality and how it is undertaken will depend largely upon the knowledge, experience and relationship the researcher holds with beadwork and the questions they seek to understand through this practice.

### **Beaded Medicine Bags**

I began creating the beaded medicine bags in November 2018 while I was preparing my application to the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board. During this time, I was engaged in thinking about accountability, the methodology, my intentions for this research, and the specific steps I would take within the research process. I was also thinking about the research participants and how I wanted to honour and create space for the diversity of knowledge, experience, story and beadwork they might bring into this research. Story has the potential to generate a large volume of data and I hoped for at most, six participants. I began by creating six medicine bags, one for each potential participant.

Each bag was made with Alaskan split hide and secured with a strip of brain-tanned leather that was elastic enough to hold the beaded medicine bag around the neck and close to the heart. A single flower is beaded on each bag. I chose a simple floral pattern from *A Beginner's Guide to Metis Floral Beadwork* (Scofield, Farrell Racette & Briley, 2011). Floral patterns are a distinguishing feature of Metis beadwork (Scofield et al., 2011). I wanted to honour my personal connections to beadwork and the strong tradition of beading that has existed for generations among my ancestors through incorporating Metis floral patterns into my medicine bags. Beaded flowers have also been very significant in my journey to reconnect with identity through beadwork. My very first beadwork projects were beaded flowers and I continue to use them frequently within my work. Prairie wildflower season is my favorite. I thought about how flowers are among the most beautiful gifts found upon the land, especially on the prairies in

Manitoba. I wanted the beadwork to be connected to the land, to reflect its central importance to the beliefs I bring into this research.

### **Relational Accountability**

Although I did not know who my participants would be, I created a beaded medicine bag for each one of them with the same intent. The medicine bags were created to express my intention to go about doing this research in a good way, to be a respectful and humble storyteller, and to share and give back beadwork and story in exchange for the same. Indigenous methodologies revolve around relational accountability, demonstrating our intent to conduct research in a way that is authentic, credible and based on maintaining relationships and relational ways of doing research (Wilson, 2008). Relational accountability is also embedded within Indigenous knowledges and worldviews, and within the relationships formed through storytelling (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). The creating and gifting of beadwork and the story contained within the beadwork was meant as a gesture of reciprocity, to give back, build a relationship, and honour the gift of beadwork knowledge that would be shared in a way that was most congruent within a beading methodology.

Traditional Cree protocols of offering tobacco are also a gesture of respect and giving thanks for knowledge shared by participants (Kovach, 2009). Sage, as a women's medicine, supports strength, healing, spiritual awareness and clarity of intent (KiiskeeNtum, 1998). Tobacco and sage were bundled in yellow cloth, tied with sinew, and were the medicines placed inside the bags that would be gifted to the Indigenous women in my research. The sage I had picked and dried the previous summer. I had gone out to the land just outside the city limits of Winnipeg and offered tobacco for the sage I brought home. I wanted to honour my relationship to the prairie land the research took place upon. This was done not only through the inclusion of

sage, but through the experience of gathering and preparing it. The smoke from the burning of this sage was also used to smudge each bag before they were gifted. The inclusion of traditional medicine and choice of creating a beaded medicine bag itself was also meant to acknowledge beading as medicine to heal. Beading is a practice that shares a strong relationship with healing, (Anderson, 2016; Bourgeois, 2018; Hanson & Griffiths, 2016; Ray, 2016). I had experienced healing through beading by learning a traditional skill, recognizing my role within culture, reconnecting with my ancestors, and being able to tell my story in my own way, through beadwork. The connection between beading and healing was an important one that I hoped to not only explore within my research, but to also reflect in my beading methodology. Healing and resiliency were what I wanted to draw attention to through my methodology, rather than focusing solely on the impact of historical and colonial oppressions on the lives and identities of the participants.

### **Beading Epistemology**

The beaded medicine bags were created to not only illustrate my understanding of beading as methodology, but also its underlying epistemological and ontological roots. Beading as epistemology advances the idea that through the process of beading, individual and subjective knowledge, memory, and experience are created and then stitched into our beadwork (Bourgeois, 2018; Ray, 2016). The beaded flowers on the medicine bags were meant to convey the beliefs about knowledge that I approached this research with. Although each medicine bag is similar in construction and beaded with a four petaled flower, each flower is unique. Each flower is beaded with different combinations of colors and no combination is the same. I let my creative vision flow and was guided by intuition in the selection of color. I did not bead any of the medicine bags with a preconceived color scheme in mind. The uniqueness of the flowers

demonstrates that there are potentially many stories and many knowledges to be uncovered through beadwork and beadwork stories, that none are invalid. This knowledge is retained within the beadwork however, because it is subjective and personal knowledge, only the creator of the beaded piece can truly interpret or tell its story and relay the knowledge. According to Absolon, (2011) “the journey of gathering Indigenous knowledge requires tools of translation” (p.91). Within a beading methodology, story is the tool in translating beading knowledges into language through beadwork stories.

### **Wholistic Knowledges**

The differing and unique flowers were meant to honour the unique contribution that each participant would make to this research through the wholistic and personal knowledges held within their beadwork and beading stories. The choice of a four petaled flower was deliberate. The four petals are influenced by the four directions of the Medicine Wheel and represent a wholistic and relational understanding of the nature of Indigenous knowledges, experiences, identity and healing – all of which were integral to exploring my research questions. Wholeness within the Medicine Wheel is about understanding each part of the wheel and its relationship to all the other parts (Hart, 2002). The center circle of each flower signifies the self. Each petal is interconnected with the center, and is meant to represent the heart, mind, body, and spirit and my belief that when we engage with beadwork, we do so with the whole of our being and engage in this practice with all parts of ourselves. Bourgeois (2018) states, “the act of beading is holistic in nature, and stimulates emotional, spiritual, physical and mental processes” (p.46). Through these processes comes knowledge that is wholistic and experiential, encompassing the whole of what we experience through the senses of our minds, hearts, bodies and spirits when we do beadwork. A wholistic relationship is established with the beadwork through these senses, and the

knowledge, memories and stories connected to our beadwork comes from all these parts of ourselves.

Within Indigenous methodologies, knowledge itself is bound within the relationships and connections formed with everything in our environment; where an object or thing is not as important as our relationship to it (Wilson, 2008). This wholistic understanding is fundamental to how I view knowledge within beadwork and what I believe can be known through our relationship to this practice. How and what we come to know through beading is wholly connected to ourselves, and our ways of knowing, being and doing. Knowledge is a process, and when it is accessed through practices such as beading, it then “provides a way to know with your being as opposed to just your mind” (Ray, 2016, p.373). The four petaled flower is meant to acknowledge and create space for the inclusion of knowledges from the heart, mind, body and spirit that are inherent within the beadwork and stories shared by the participants.

### **Spirit Beads**

Through a wholistic understanding of beading knowledges, space is also created for the inclusion of spiritual knowledges within the research process. Spirit encompasses inner knowledge that moves beyond those knowledges that are accessed through the more tangible parts of ourselves; in our minds, bodies, and hearts. These knowledges reflect our inner sense of connection to the greater universe (Wilson, 2008). They include perceptual experiences, insights, intuitions, reflections, inner knowings, dreams and visions (Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). The beaded medicine bags were the first project I had undertaken in which I had incorporated the use of spirit beads.

A spirit bead is an intentional flaw created within an otherwise perfect piece of beadwork to demonstrate humbleness before the Creator, and to show that nothing on Earth given to us by the Creator is perfect, including ourselves (Scofield et al., 2011). Within one petal of each beaded flower, a bead in its center has been stitched deliberately out of place. The medicine bags, their stories and knowledges, are all connected through their spirit beads. The color of the spirit bead is the same in each of them – a light pearlescent pink. I was guided by intuition in selecting which petal they would be placed in, knowing that no matter where I placed this bead, it would never take away from the whole beauty of the flower. The inclusion of spirit beads is meant to demonstrate that spiritual knowledges are part of the beauty of Indigenous knowledges, subtly woven through them, not unlike the spirit beads in my medicine bags.

Spirit beads have also been referred to as humility beads. Humility requires insight and the ability to acknowledge not only our strengths, but our griefs, traumas and weaknesses. Finding a spirit bead is considered a gift that can reveal how important and dignified being different can be and the strengths and frailties of being human (Stout, 2008). I felt this teaching was an important one to carry into research that concerns Indigenous identity. Within my beading methodology, the spirit bead is meant to acknowledge that nothing about ourselves, our experiences, our knowledges, or our beadwork is perfect. What we may consider to be flaws are part of what makes us unique. Knowledge created through the practice of beading is unique and specific, deeply connected to the individual, their ancestors and cultural identity (Bourgeois, 2018). Spirit beads are meant to invite the diversity of spiritual knowledge and experience into the research process and to uphold these knowledges as a valid part of the whole of what we can know through beading as a method of inquiry in research.

## **Beading Stories**

The beaded medicine bags were more than a paradigm or framework to relay my understanding of beading knowledges and how they relate to my research questions. They were also created in order to become part of the research methods. Indigenous methodologies contain not only a knowledge belief system and its underlying ontological and epistemological roots, but also includes the actual methods used (Kovach, 2009). Beadwork stories were the method of inquiry used to approach my research questions. A beading methodology shares many elements with Indigenous storytelling methodologies as these two practices are inseparable from one another (Ray, 2016). Beadwork retains the stories and knowledge of its creator, and stories and conversations about beadwork have the potential to uncover and transmit subjective meaning that is specific and unique to the individual (Bourgeois, 2018; Ray, 2016). I wanted to explore my research questions through beadwork and beading stories because according to Ray (2016), they are “an advanced system of knowledge production and transmission” for Indigenous women (p.368). Initially, I created the beaded medicine bags with a singular vision of gifting them to participants as part of my commitment to relational accountability. However, as I spent time reflecting on my methodology and its relationship to this beadwork, I quickly realized that there were stories within this work that were important to the research process and needed to be shared with participants.

Stories offer context to beadwork, without the accompanying story, only part of its knowledge can be relayed or interpreted. My beading story, my reasons for doing this research, and the knowledges and beliefs I held about what can be known through this practice were embedded within each bag I created and could be relayed to the participants through the story of this beadwork. Kovach (2009) states, “in asking others to share stories, it is necessary to share

our own, starting with self-location” (p.98). Although I created a medicine bag for each participant, I also created one for myself. Within my medicine bag, I decided I would carry not only tobacco and sage, but also my Kookum’s beaded necklace. Her beadwork was integrally connected to my beading story, and the reasons why I was doing this research. Through my own beaded medicine bag and Kookum’s beaded necklace, I would be able to share my self location with participants in a way that was most congruent with my beading methodology.

I also understood the sharing of story as a reciprocal process and believed that the sharing of beading stories was no different. Storytelling in research allows the teller to share their story on their own terms, using their own voice according to Thomas (2015), who also says that sharing story validates the storyteller’s experience and “has the ability to give others with similar stories the strength, encouragement, and support they need to tell their own stories” (p.195). I saw an opportunity for the beaded medicine bags to act as a facilitator in the reciprocal process of storytelling. Their presence could support and encourage the participants to engage in the process of discussing and sharing their own personal connections to their beadwork and their own stories of identity. I believe beadwork has the power to inspire story and the sharing of knowledges among Indigenous people and between generations. Knowledge and skill required for beading was traditionally learned, practiced and shared communally and intergenerationally (Hanson & Griffiths, 2016). Beadwork stories uphold the oral tradition in the gathering and sharing of Indigenous knowledges within research. Through the gifting of the beaded medicine bags and the sharing of my beadwork and story, I would be able to pass my knowledge along to participants and create a supportive space to receive beading knowledges from them.

## Reflections

Although I had never learned the skill of beading from my Kookum, I believe her beading knowledges were never lost and were lying dormant within me. Her beaded necklace was not just jewellery or art that were gifted to me, it was the knowledge within her beadwork that was the greater gift. It was knowledge of beading as an Indigenous way of knowing, being and doing that I was able to connect with and then apply to my own life and my own ways of doing research and asking questions about the experiences of other Indigenous women. I would place my Kookum's necklace, her knowledges into my beaded medicine bag and bring them with me into the research process. When I look back on this now, I realize the act of doing so had a more significant meaning. It was a gesture meant to signify the connection with my Kookum and her knowledges had not been severed, but had in fact, been restored through my connection to beadwork. Bringing her knowledges into the research process was part of acknowledging that the tradition of passing knowledges and ways of being among Indigenous people and between generations would continue and be upheld through beadwork, and through this research journey.

## **Chapter Four: Research Process**

Through this research, my goal was to create a deeper understanding of how urban Indigenous women experience reconnections with identity when beading practices become incorporated into their lives. This inquiry was explored from the perspectives of Indigenous women through beadwork stories using a beading methodology. The sections that follow within this chapter describe the specific steps of the research process.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Before Indigenous women were invited to share beadwork stories, University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board approval was sought and granted. This involved developing recruitment flyers, interview questions, forms for informed consent, and a clear ethical process to respect participants in this study. In addition to adhering to university research ethics, I also brought my own Indigenous ethical orientation into my way of being within this research project. I am guided by the ethical teachings of the seven grandfathers: courage, love, honesty, humility, respect, wisdom and truth. I am also guided by my responsibility to all my relations – relational accountability. As an act of relationality and accountability to my participants, the opportunity to provide feedback, review, and approve their transcripts was provided to ensure their words are reflected as they wish. Wilson (2008) reminds us about ownership - that knowledge is part of relationships and cannot be owned, and that it becomes more difficult to protect Indigenous knowledges once they are put forward. In centering Indigenous women's beading knowledges within this study, I have an ethical responsibility to my participants and to all my relations to ensure there is no risk of those knowledges or stories being misappropriated. In accomplishing

this, my ethical orientation is informed by my knowledge and understanding of the damaging history of exploitative research involving Indigenous people.

### **Participants**

Exploring the question of how urban Indigenous women experience *reconnections* to identity, implies a disconnection with some aspect of identity. According to Anderson (2000) relationships held with family, ancestors, community, land, language, traditions and spirituality have supported Indigenous women in fostering a positive sense of cultural identity. I wanted to engage with participants who had experienced past or present disruptions to these relationships, and who have established a personal practice of beading within their lives. My intent was to explore how this practice may contribute towards healing, re-establishing or deepening the connection they hold with their identity as Indigenous women. Since my research question was specific to the experiences of Indigenous women, I sought adult participants over the age of 18, who self-identified as Indigenous women, and who lived within the urban context of Winnipeg. Participants were invited to share their insight and experience through stories and conversations about beadwork during an in-person interview. Stories have the potential to generate a large body of data, therefore, I wanted to choose a smaller sample size and decided I would recruit up to six individual participants. The choice of a small sample size also stems from a desire to ensure that data generated through stories maintains context, depth and manageability, while ensuring beadwork stories remain intact and true to the storytellers.

### **Recruitment**

When I began this study, I didn't have any connections to any other Indigenous beadwork practitioners in Winnipeg. I had learned beading on my own. I read books. I went online. I

watched videos. I had some virtual connections through Indigenous beadwork pages and social media groups, but no direct personal connections to other beadworkers who I could have approached to participate in this study. I decided to employ a snowball sampling process to identify potential participants where I developed a recruitment poster to distribute my study information among my existing social networks, both online and among the community connections I had in Winnipeg. The recruitment poster asked: “Is beading a part of your life?” (Appendix A). It outlined the purpose and intent of the research, participant criteria, and asked Indigenous women to consider participating in an in-person interview between 1-2 hours in length, to share and discuss their personal connections to beadwork. I distributed this poster online, through my social media contacts and through email to some of my acquaintances and colleagues. I asked them to pass the recruitment poster along to anyone they knew who might fit the criteria and be interested in participating in this research. In addition to these steps, I also sought permission to display this poster at the Winnipeg Trading Post, which is a local bead shop in Winnipeg and through a few local bead groups I was aware of within Winnipeg. As a result of my initial steps towards recruitment, three Indigenous women contacted me to express interest in participation after my recruitment poster was shared on social media and through email. A fourth participant contacted me after seeing my poster displayed at the Winnipeg Trading Post, and the fifth and final participant was recruited after my poster was shared at a local Winnipeg beading group.

### **Informed Consent**

Forms for informed consent were prepared to be given to participants prior to their participation (Appendix B). The consent form detailed the purpose and objective of the research study, the potential risks and benefits of participation, and how information, identity and stories

would be collected, protected and kept confidential. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and a condensed version of each participant's beading story was created to be shared within the final written thesis. Participants were advised that they would be able to review, edit and approve their beading story prior to its inclusion, and that they would be gifted with beadwork handmade by the researcher for their participation. They were also advised that their participation was voluntary. They would still be entitled to keep the beaded medicine bag gifted to them if they chose to withdraw, and they could withdraw at any time with no questions asked.

When participants contacted me to express interest in this study, the consent form was emailed to them along with an interview guide. The interview guide contained a list of six questions that would be used to guide the discussion during the in-person interview (Appendix C). I explained that the interview itself would be unstructured, allowing them to share their beadwork stories in whatever manner they wished. Participants were also asked to bring photographs or examples of their beadwork to the interview, and to consider those examples they felt a personal connection to, or through which they may have learned something of themselves through the process of creating it. It was explained to the participants that I did not intend to keep their beadwork, but that it would serve as a visual and tangible reference that I hoped would also guide our discussion during the in-person interview. Some of the questions within the interview guide referred specifically to the beadwork the participant brought with them and included:

1. Can you share a bit about yourself and some of the disconnections from your culture or Indigenous identity that you might have experienced?
2. How did you learn to bead? What motivated you to learn or continue this practice?
3. How does your practice of beading connect you to your culture and identity as an Indigenous woman?
4. Tell me about the beadwork you have brought with you today. What is the story of each piece?

5. Can you share some of your personal connections to these pieces? What influenced them or what you may have learned about yourself through the process of creating them?
6. How has your perspective/view of who you are in terms of your cultural identity, changed along with your practice of beading?

I chose to share these questions with the participants beforehand so that they would have ample time to fully consider all aspects of their participation including what they would be asked to share and reflect upon. I wanted them to have a very clear idea of what this research was about and give them time to consider how they and their beadwork might fit within it before they were asked if they wanted to take the next step by arranging an interview.

### **Confidentiality & Anonymity**

Confidentiality was also highlighted within the forms for informed consent. Participants were able to choose whether to keep their identity anonymous and choose their own pseudonym to be referred to within the research results. I also shared my responsibility to protect their information by ensuring all interview recordings, transcripts and written stories were stored on a separate, password protected disk, and kept along with any written or printed information within a locked container in my home. Participants were also asked to consider whether they wanted to keep their beadwork confidential. As part of informed consent, I explained to each participant that I would ask for permission to include photographs of their beadwork to share alongside their beading story within the final thesis. There are limits to confidentiality in sharing beadwork. Beadwork is integrally connected to our identity. The individual, unique nature of beadwork creates the possibility that participants could still be identified through their beadwork if they chose to share it while still keeping their identity confidential. Each participant was encouraged to consider this, and each was given the option to choose confidentiality for both their beadwork

and their identity. They were free to choose to keep all, none or only one of these things confidential.

### **Research Settings**

Once participants had time to consider the interview guide and informed consent, I generally followed up with most within the first week of distributing these materials. If participants were still interested in participating at this point, an in-person interview was arranged. I encouraged the Indigenous women to determine the settings in which they would feel most comfortable sharing their beadwork stories. I also offered some alternatives such as the private study spaces within the Winnipeg Public Libraries or the meeting room at the Manitoba Indigenous Cultural Education Center. Three participants chose to meet at a Winnipeg Public Library location closest to their home or workplace. One of the participants invited me to meet with her at her office which was located within a local social service agency. The fifth participant invited me to meet at her home. All interviews took place between February 2019 and April 2019 in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

### **Research Preparations**

I ensured that at least six beaded medicine bags had been completed by the time I was ready to begin recruiting participants. In preparation for each interview, I selected and smudged a medicine bag for the participant I would be meeting with. I felt a pang of uncertainty each time I was faced with the task of gifting one of these medicine bags. I had spent some dark and cold winter nights making them as I prepared for this research and felt very connected to this work. I relied on my internal sense of knowing in deciding which medicine bag felt ‘right’ to bring into each meeting. In preparation, I also smudged myself and my own beaded medicine bag

containing my Kookum's beaded necklace. I carried both medicine bags within a small box along with a bundle of sage. I had purchased this box during my first trip to Victoria when I began my MSW journey and felt it was significant to the beginnings of this research journey. A goose feather and smudging pan were also brought for the participants to use if they wished. Along with the beaded medicine bags, I also brought water and a small snack for each participant.

### **Gathering Beading Stories**

At the start of each interview, I provided each Indigenous woman with a printed copy of the consent form, reviewed confidentiality and asked if they had any questions before asking them to sign the form. Of the five women who participated, only one chose to remain anonymous and use a self-determined pseudonym. All participants provided consent for photographs of their beadwork to be included. A printed copy of the interview guide was also provided for reference and digital recording of the interview began only after consent was given.

I opened the beadwork story sharing process by presenting each Indigenous woman with the beaded medicine bag I created for them. In doing so, I shared some of the meaning behind this beadwork. I explained how each beaded medicine bag was created to reflect the beliefs I held about beadwork as a way of knowing and gathering knowledge in research. I told participants about how I was gifting this beadwork to express my respect and responsibility for the beading knowledges they would share with me. I also shared my own beaded medicine bag and Kookum's beaded necklace. Through this beadwork, I told participants some of my own beading story, and about how beadwork became an important part of reconnecting with and knowing my Indigenous culture and identity. The focus was then shifted towards the

participants who were invited to share their own beadwork and their own experience of identity and healing through their beadwork and stories.

Participants were free to follow the questions provided within the interview guide or begin sharing in their own way. The interview did not follow a structured format. All participants chose to begin sharing in their own way. The questions contained within the interview guide were used mainly as prompts to maintain the focus and flow of the interview when necessary. The interview questions were also referred to at the end of the interview to check-in with participants to see if they had anything additional to add in relation to the questions. I used my digital camera to take photographs of the participant's beadwork throughout the interview process. Some of the participants emailed photos of their beadwork to me beforehand, which we reviewed together during the interview in the absence of their beadwork. Each Indigenous woman was free to determine when they were finished sharing and the interview concluded. Each beadwork story sharing session spanned between 1 and 1.5 hours each.

### **Preparing Beading Stories**

Following the in-person interviews, my next task was creating a verbatim transcript of each interview. I wanted to ensure that every word was accurately captured and transcribed each interview myself. Fraser (2004) notes that this allows the researcher to become closer to the stories, creating an opportunity to develop a relationship with the beadwork stories prior to any analysis of them. Thematic analysis was chosen to analyze the beadwork stories I had gathered. The strength in this approach is that it allows for the stories to remain true to their form, maintaining their descriptive details and context while adhering to ethics of respectful storytelling. The early stages of data analysis can also begin through the process of transcription

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). I was conscious of this as I prepared the verbatim transcripts. I began to take note of recurring themes as I transcribed each interview. These were the beginnings of data analysis as I searched for patterns, similarities, differences and points of interest across all five of the interviews.

The more daunting task I found was creating the condensed versions of each participant's beadwork story. As much as I wished I could have included each and every word from the in-person interviews, this was not feasible. The verbatim transcripts spanned between 30 and 40 pages each. Including each completed transcript would have made for a monstrous sized thesis which is why I had proposed to create a condensed version of the beadwork story shared by each participant. The other concern I had was about editing stories. I was again thinking of the history of exploitative research and misrepresentation of Indigenous people's knowledge, words and perspective in research and wanted to ensure that I maintained the integrity and spirit of what had been shared with me. I also knew this was the version of the participant's beadwork story that I would put forth in my thesis and that the participants would also review and provide feedback on. The worry around this proved to be a bit of a stumbling block as I struggled with my own self-doubt about being able to do justice to the stories, to do right by them, do no harm. As a result, I spent a lot of time on this task and estimate it took me at least 200 hours to create the transcripts and condensed version of each story. In creating the condensed stories, I decided to concentrate on the Indigenous women's words and filtered out everything else until all that remained was one long narrative of everything they said in their interview, from beginning to end. I took great care and consideration in organizing and condensing these narratives into paragraphs. Some of the paragraphs were rearranged to maintain continuity and flow.

Throughout this process, I continued to pay close attention to the patterns and themes that became visible as each of the five beadwork stories took shape.

In order to ensure the condensed version of their story was an accurate reflection of what the women had shared within their interview, both the transcript and condensed story were sent back to participants to review. When I sent the stories back, I shared with each participant which parts of their story stood out and connected with what some of the other participants had shared. I reminded each woman that the condensed version of her story would be the version ultimately shared and published within my thesis. I encouraged each woman to provide feedback and suggest any edits or revisions to their story. I also offered the opportunity to arrange a second meeting to further discuss, review and revise their stories if they wished. The feedback I received was encouraging and positive with only a few minor revisions suggested. None of the participants required a second meeting and any revisions to the stories were done in consultation with the participants over the phone or through email.

### **Reflections on the Process**

Beaded medicine bags created a safe space to engage in the reciprocal and communal process of sharing. Beading is a communal practice, in which the experience of the beadworker is incorporated and expressed through beadwork that “tells a story of the beader in relation to his or her community and culture, enacting a collective framework of interpretation” (Ray, 2016, p.371). The presence of beadwork inspired story and sharing. The beaded medicine bags acted like a talking stick, and I noted how they helped the participants stay grounded during the process of storytelling. I was also amazed at how their presence sparked conversation, sharing and connections that were not always explicit but felt. I noted that each participant held the medicine bag in their hands throughout parts of the interview while they were speaking. I noted

that I did the same, my Kookum's beaded necklace poking out from my own. I held my beadwork and hers together while I sat and listened to each woman share her beading story. Holding all those knowledges within the same space was a powerful experience for me that really did demonstrate that feeling of connecting through beading, story and knowledges.

I also noted that the beadwork stories themselves were not only about the beadwork and its construction and aesthetic or what it represented or symbolized. At the core of these stories were the lives of the Indigenous women themselves, and the stories of their ancestors. Their beadwork is an embodiment of their lived experience of healing and identity. The beading stories are presented in the chapter that follows. They were reviewed, revised and approved by each participant. I wanted to ensure their beadwork was included as it is an integral and vital part of this research, and I knew that the stories connected to the beadwork they shared would need to be shared alongside them. The stories are presented in whole so that the reader may understand their whole context before analysis of them in relation to the research questions follows.

## **Chapter Five: Beadwork Stories**

### **Violet's Beading Story**

*I was contacted by Violet after she saw my recruitment poster shared at a local beading group. Violet's condensed story was also the first I completed, so I felt this was the best place to begin. Violet chose to remain anonymous and chose her own pseudonym. She shared her beadwork story with me on April 12, 2019.*

My mother grew up in Selkirk. Everybody on my mother's side is all Aboriginal. My mother grew up when you didn't want any acknowledgement that you were Native, so she never ever acknowledged it. I never knew my mother's parents. Violet, my mother's mother, died really young and then my mother's father remarried after Violet died. There's a split family there. My father was of Scotch descent, so everything was, "oh you're Scottish." I only knew my father's – the Scottish side. My grandfather was really Scottish. He immigrated here and married an English lady. When they immigrated in, they could get English brides and that's how my grandma came to be with my grandfather. So that's the only heritage that we knew.

I grew up mostly in the city. We were just on the outskirts and then we moved closer in when I was in grade three. My mother never ever came to school to participate in anything. My mother did all the baking for the bake sales, she sent money for everything else, but she never came. I think I was in about grade four and it was parent teacher. My mom and dad went to the school, came back, and the next day a girl said to me, "Oh, we seen your mom. You're mom's an Indian!" And I said, "No she's not." When I went home, I told my mom and she said, "Oh, they're just teasing you. Don't pay any attention to them, you're Scottish." I guess I always went along with that Scottish roots all the time I was growing up. As a kid, like you don't

question it, do you? You don't want to say things because maybe people will be nasty to you. People will be prejudice. It's really too bad when people feel they have to hide that. You have to acknowledge your roots and where you came from, right?

My husband was so strong in his identity, his culture. His family are really strong Francophones. I had no problem with that at all. It was when I finally had my son that I jumped in there 100%. I went and learned conversational French, I took my son to a French school, I took my son to a French church. Now he's in Montreal doing his master's and his doctorate, in French. We just totally immersed him in French but that was okay because I wanted my son to know and be strong in that. Then there's part of you that says, "well there's part of you missing over here." My son has the two pieces – this is dad, this is mom. I've only got one piece! It's like you're missing part of your body. If you put it to yourself? It's as if somebody took my arm off. This makes the whole person. This makes me. You've got to kind of say, okay we better look at this, we better know this, we better understand it so we can give to our son everything that he needs. He needs that. He needs that too.

My sister and I were trying to get our status. They kept saying that you got to have more proof. I don't know how much more proof we can research. We started the research before my mom had died and she still would never acknowledge her own culture. We had our genealogy done and everything. I have my Metis status now and I have very fair skin. My two brothers do as well but my sister doesn't. She's got more of an olive colored complexion, so you don't see it at all in me. People would think, oh you're not Metis. Sometimes it's an advantage and sometimes it's a disadvantage.

I had explored Aboriginal culture a little bit. Everybody's so busy with their lives and working. You don't have time to sit and explore. You just rush, rush, rush. It's nice to learn

and explore and I always try to get into as many learning experiences as I could while I was a daycare worker at a residential treatment facility. When I used to work, that's when I had the opportunity to learn and do different things. I took the women's sacred teachings, an Ojibway language class, I had a drum made for me, I went to sweats. Anyplace I could kind of jump in and learn stuff, I tried. And then I went to beading.

This is my second year I've gone to beading. I really wanted to learn how to do it. I'm a creative person. Anything creative I like to do. I sew and I like to create things. Oh, I'm so happy no matter what I sew! We went to the AGM two or three years ago now. We were walking around looking at some of the different vendors and the displays. I met a lady there who was talking about the beading group and I said, "oh I really would like to come." I wanted my husband to come with me so the first year it was just me and my husband that went. He did the projects with me and it was really good. Usually I drag my sister along with me (laughs). I've convinced her to come and my uncle too.



*Figure 2.* Violet's first beading project

That's the very first project I did (Figure 2). Oh, I was so happy, I was so excited. I think just to be able to create some of the cultural identities of the Metis and being in there with a lot of the other ladies. You get to see the people there and who has been beading for awhile and you listen to people talk. There's one lady who shares a lot of stories. I've heard a lot of these stories through working and through the women's sacred teachings too. It just reinforces some of the things I've heard and learned. We learn more every time we go. We see different things. There's just so much shared there, more than just a pattern for this or a pattern for that.

We made the little flower. We made the medicine bags and then I made some moccasins. I started making moccasins just for my family. I made a few pairs and I got better as I was going along. It was interesting because then I wasn't working anymore. I said, well you know what, I think I could make them and sell them. Even my son said that. He said, "you should make them and sell them, at least then you'll make some money." That would be good. I want to start and set up a business for myself. I'm staying home no matter what because of my husband's health. I need to be there for him.

I was thinking hmm...what kind of name would I call my company then? I doodled flowers all the time and I'm still doing it. Always in my mind this flower is a red flower. I thought, if I'm connecting back to my mom's mother, maybe I'll call it Violet's. I had made this medicine bag, and it's got little violets on it. Last night I said to my husband, I need to see exactly how violets look. It's things like that where I'm like, maybe it's a bit of my grandma talking to me through this. I don't know. You just never ever know.

I made one pair of moccasins and I asked one lady, "Do you sell all yours? How do you price them?" She said, you have to take in consideration your leather, your beads, what kind of fur you put on them and things like that, but she wasn't saying too much. Then I asked another

lady. She said “IF you’re Metis and you say that they’re hand beaded and hand sewn. IF you’re Metis...” I didn’t say anything right away. I thought hmm...I wonder if she thinks I’m not Metis? (laughs) So I didn’t say anything right away. I went home and I had told my sister. I said, I think you better come to my beading class with me because I don’t think they think I’m Metis. We were kind of laughing about that because if you seen my sister, she looks like me, but I’ve got such fair skin.



*Figure 3.* Moccasins made for Violet’s brother

I made moccasins for my brother (Figure 3). I thought, now I have to pick the right colors to put on his moccasins, something that’s going to say this is the significance of me making it and the culture coming in. My brother has no understanding of it. I don’t know if he doesn’t want to, or maybe his wife is not interested to know that side. So I beaded a semi-circle and I used all the colors from the medicine wheel. I thought okay, it’s not too much and it’s in your face. It’s discreetly there. It makes people think a little bit. When I made those for my

brother, my sister-in-law said, “what did you say about those colors on his moccasins?” I said, “Oh, well those are all the colors of the medicine wheel.” She said, “Oh yes, I was trying to tell someone.” And I thought, good. She’s warming up slowly to it. Sometimes we have to go a little bit slow because people have to warm up and hear stuff slowly.



*Figure 4.* Color bursts.

These ones are called color bursts (Figure 4) because my sister-in-law went back to China, just before Christmas and she bought me some beads. She packaged them in a box but by the time it got to me from Montreal, about five of the packages stayed intact and all these colors had broken open in the box. I took the colors that had all broken apart in there and put them on here and I made the color burst. That’s the story behind those ones. The colors were so nice! I thought, Oh I love those colors! They looked so rich and so nice. I was so, so excited.



*Figure 5. Bluebird Moccasins.*

These are my birds, and they're not upside down (Figure 5). My sister and husband said, "you put it on upside down." I said, no it's not. I want you to be able to see the birds when you're sitting there. The birds are so you can see them, not for anybody else to see them. I like birds and I like a lot of nature stuff. The blue bird is because I wanted a bird on my moccasins. The first bird, he just didn't look right. It looked like he had a big white, fat, stomach (laughs). I had to take most of the bird apart and then re-do him.

My son is a hunter, he uses a traditional bow to hunt. He is an outdoors, back to the earth kind of person. He only wants wool stuff and all-natural fibers. It's changed a lot of how we think about things like that. We've gone so much more back to the earth. My son and I have talked many times about how if you're going to shoot an animal, then you're going to use all of it, which is good because it's all repurposed. That put another idea in my mind. My son might be able to come home for Christmas and go hunting. I thought, that's good to know, maybe he'll be able to get a hide for me.

I will show you something else. Certain things come to you and you go, "oh that would be perfect right there." I think that's what happens with some things. Before I got into any of this beading, I had met this lady and she created a special Christmas stocking from her

daughter's blouses when she was a little girl. I thought that is so beautiful, that is so nice. I kept that thought filed away in my head. When my mother passed, my sister said, "oh do you want to take some of mom's clothing?" It just came to me - that Christmas stocking. I said, Oh yes! I want all of mom's blouses. I brought it to show you because it's so neat (Figure 6). This is not my beadwork but I really, really loved it. I had gotten a hold of this piece of beadwork, I loved it and I kept it. I thought oh, I know where I'll put that piece! I'm going to put it on my stocking. On this stocking is all my family – my mother, sister, brothers and father. I was thinking that when I make my son's, because I've been keeping his stuff, now I'll be able to bead on his.



*Figure 6.* Family stocking.

How does beading change my perspective on being Metis? I guess I'm just more connected. You see more people. You feel like you're in there with them. Lots of times when I was working, if I go to a pow wow it's like, well I don't know anybody here other than the people from work! It's not like I know someone here. Then again, when I'm there, I don't look like I fit in here. You want to be able to say, "Yeah! I really do fit in here! And this is how I fit in here!" So if I can't say this is how I fit, this is me, then I can't say to my son, this all makes you. It makes you more. It gives you more. It makes more for you.

It's not something that will happen over night but I'm going in the right direction. That's the most important thing because you don't just learn that much or not learn that much over night. It takes time, eh? As long as I'm able to pass things on to my son, and then whenever my son has grandchildren, I can pass some things on to them. You can say, "Okay, so look at this. This is something you might be interested in." We never know, we just have to keep showing people. They might not be interested at the time, but they might be interested five years down the road. It's hard to know. We have the knowledge to pass on to them. If we don't have it, then they're not even ever exposed to it. We need to be able to have something.... to expose our children to. It's usually the Elders that are showing the other ones, right? It's usually the Elders that are passing on the information and things like that, right? And seeing how I'm the oldest daughter (laughs). I guess it's for me to take up the torch and carry on.

### **Amy's Beading Story**

*Amy was the first participant to contact me after my recruitment poster was circulated through social media and email. Amy is a social worker who invited me to meet with her at her office. She shared her beading story with me on February 21, 2019.*

I'm Metis, but a very pale version of Metis flavour, with green eyes and red hair. I grew up off and on reserves as a kid. My mom worked on reserves, so we lived in Easterville for awhile. I have both Cree and Ojibway, and I have it on both sides. I'm much more spiritually connected to the history of my Aboriginal family than I am to my Caucasian family, though felt guilty about the way I look. Some of my family tried to pretend we weren't Aboriginal but were making beadwork and speaking Cree (laughs) and doing some ceremony stuff. I went to my first

sweat lodge when I was seven or eight. It was an interesting juxtaposition of participating in strong Aboriginal practices but also just like, denying that they were Aboriginal practices, or that this piece existed.

My mom's mother is Ojibway and Scottish and her mother was a midwife and a seamstress. She had the first birthing center in Manitoba. I feel like I got the doula/midwife piece that I feel strongly about from her. And I feel like I got the gardening, beading, artistic piece from my dad's mother. She lived in a Ukrainian community called Ethelbert, Manitoba. Some of her family is from Fairford but she moved there when she married my grandfather. I was supposed to call her Kookoo in the house but outside of the house, I was supposed to call her Granny. There was this kind of disconnect, of the secret and the public. She did beautiful beadwork and beautiful pysanka which is the Ukrainian Easter eggs.

For me, beading has been about connecting with my grandma even though initially I was not thrilled about the whole situation (laughs). As a kid, I was more interested in running around on the tractor with my grandfather, chasing deer, rabbits, and playing with the chickens. She used to drag me in the house to bead and I'd be like, do we have to? Her little friends would come over, these little tiny old ladies, and they would bead and speak this different language. It was like a combination of Cree and Ukrainian. They were married to Ukrainian men, still trying to kind of – pretend to be Ukrainian but then speaking their native language. Some of the words I would hear would be in Cree or Ojibway but then I'd be confused because I'd be using the wrong words because they were Ukrainian words (laughs). But I didn't really put all those pieces together as a kid, right?

I ran away from home when I was twelve and a half because there was all kinds of crazy shit going on. I lived on the streets of Vancouver and I got connected with some Elders there. I

did some ceremony and I remember one day they were doing this beading thing and I was like, oh hey, I can do this! My grandma used to force me to do this, it was terrible! I made a few little medicine bags and lighter cases but then I didn't really touch it for awhile.

I had a baby when I was nineteen in Vancouver with a midwife who was Aboriginal. I was able to have him at home and have that real...cultural support. I remember her talking to me about my Kookum and saying, "She's here with you even though she's over there." When my son was born, my midwife said, "Oh my god, he's an old soul!" He's the whitest kid you've ever seen and has always been like, this grouchy little old man. When he was about two, he said to me, "Mom you look like I remember you from before, but you were brown, and you had black hair and you used to make beads!" I was like, what? When was that? And he said, "Oh the 1840s." He was this little two-year old kid who would have seen none of that. And it gave me chills. He said, "No you made beads and it made you happy." My grandparents still lived in Ethelbert, so I took him and drove out there. I wanted to talk to my grandma. She told me, "You need to do beadwork. You're supposed to be doing this." I hadn't done it since I was a teenager, or a kid, so I started to do beadwork. When I was pregnant with my daughter, three and a half years later, I got this really strong urge to sew quilts and make baby moccasins for her. Her baby moccasins are with her umbilical cord, some of her baby teeth, and the little eagle feather that I was gifted when she was born. I started getting back into beading when I had my kids. It was one of the things I could connect with my grandma. It wasn't until she was passing away and had dementia, that she acknowledged she was actually Cree. And she gave me a buffalo hide she kept hidden in a closet.

When my daughter was four, she fell out of a window and had a brain injury. One of the things I felt strongly was that I needed to Sundance for her, so I did. In my Sundance, the

giveaway gifts I made were all beaded, and I really felt that was part of stitching her back together. I'm a nerd. I like to study. I learned all about neural plasticity and neural pathways. The act of beading those things was the act of trying to stitch her brain back together, and re-root those pathways for her. All the beading I did was very intentional because for me, Sundancing was asking for healing for my daughter. I needed to give of myself, so I pierced and I Sundanced for four years. I helped at the lodge for three years before Sundance, partly because I was super scared to Sundance, and I've always had a feeling of guilt for looking pale, having green eyes, and not being visibly Aboriginal. One day, one of the Elders said, "That's why you're all tattooed! That's your way for people to judge you and of making yourself visibly different." I thought, well I'm sure I wasn't logically thinking that when it happened (laughs) but it was the way he perceived how many tattoos I have. My husband is Trinidadian and he's visibly brown. If I'm wearing long sleeves and we go into the airport they always pull him aside and not me. I just feel very cognizant and aware of those different kinds of pieces.

Beading is a transformative process for me. Sundancing was definitely a transformative process for me. You give of yourself to the people who are supporting you in your Sundancing. I also associated giving birth to my children at home with midwives and having my circle of women around me as a very important and transformative process for my creativity. Every time I bead something, it's like giving away part of you. It's from my brain, it's like giving birth. To me, the ability to bead and sew and the ability to visualize is a gift that I was given, probably from my grandmothers. I will sew a pair of mukluks or a dress or coat and do the beading in my head for weeks before I sit down to do it. It's like my brain is pregnant with the ideas and then, I just have to do it all at once.

Beading really did connect me with my culture. I bead in strands of four. I came to understand Aboriginal spirituality, and the Sundance, like the four directions. The fours felt very important to me. I also feel like beading helped heal me from some pretty damn tough times in my life. In my adult life I was in some pretty negative relationships and I think the one thing that saved me and kept me sane was beading. The counting over and over again - I could zone out, meditate, focus, do the beading, and reconnect to myself. No matter what's happening externally no matter how much chaos is happening around me, I'll be okay, my kids will be okay. I can bead, and I'll be okay.

I also feel like beading is a very connecting thing for me. Sometimes when I'll wear my mukluks people will say, "oh my god did you make those? Where'd you get those?" And I'm like, oh I made them. Then they'll say, "you bead?" It's super interesting because I went to Trinidad a couple years ago. My husband's aunties are very traditional Trini women. I was scared of them because they are very Catholic. I wasn't raised with religion. My parents kept me far away from that. Then I realized their Catholicism was very much mixed up in traditional Carib-Indian stuff. They do a kind of weaving with palm leaves and make all these palm leaf crosses. They were excited about the beading they'd seen me post on Facebook and to talk to me about Aboriginal people in Canada. It was exciting for them to hear about beadwork, and sweatlodges, and ceremonies and then they started talking to me about the Carib-Indian and Trinidad history and their own experience of colonization, and how it impacted them.

People ask if I sell my beadwork. I can't sell it. If I sell it, it doesn't work. Everything gets tangled. I'm angry. It twists. I only sew for love. I only bead for love. I'll trade things. I have a friend who's a beautiful potter. I traded her mukluks, gauntlets, a coat, and a hat for a full



*Figure7.* Mukluks and gauntlets for trade.

set of her pottery (Figure 7). It went beautifully. If I tried to sell it to her, it would just be a tangled catastrophe, and I would be angry. For me, it's more of a reciprocal, trading kind of thing. Selling beading is how some people make their living, and I value that. The way I'm meant to make my living is to work with people, try to help people to look at things and see hope, find different perspectives, and work from a resiliency-based, strengths-based perspective. I needed to do a lot of healing in myself in order to be able to carry that forward. Beading and sewing were a huge part of that.

Generally, I also try and make meaning. I brought mukluks that I made for myself (Figure 8). My colors for Sundance are yellow, red and white. I made them with my Sundance colors, but then I also like to wear black. My husband says its because my soul is black (laughs). I like to put fringe on the outside of my mukluks. I find rabbit fur so delicate that when you walk, it rubs the fur off. I also don't want to make the same kind of mukluks everybody else makes because I'm not the same as everybody else. That's why I like to do the fringe. My

grandma used to just bead flowers, that's kind of all she did. I'm not a stay-in-the-box kind of a girl.



*Figure 8.* Amy's Mukluks

I made these ones for an Elder that I've done a lot of work with and she's bear clan (Figure 9). I made them with the bear paw prints going up the front. Again, it's because I wasn't just beading bear paws, I was beading them for somebody who was bear clan. For me, that made a big difference.



*Figure 9.* Bear Paw Mukluks made for Amy's Elder.

These ones I made for my daughter for Christmas (Figure 10). She's wolf clan and her name is Yellow Flower. There are yellow flowers and it's a wolf paw because it's got four toes. When I made them, I had finished Sundancing for her the year before. When I'm beading, I will often think about love and protection and put prayers into it as I'm doing it. I prayed for her. It



*Figure 10.* Mukluks made for Amy's daughter.

felt like it was a culmination of the healing from Sundance. After I Sundanced, they tested the area of damage to her brain and she tested in the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile. She's reconvened her little brain. Now my daughter, who they thought might not even be able to make it through school because of her brain injury, is going to university for architecture. The other day she said, "You know, at some point would you ever teach me how to bead?" I'm not sure she's in the stage right now where she has the patience to do it. She's nineteen, but she's watched me a lot.

Part of beading and healing is having the opportunity to focus on something that your hands are doing while your brain is putting things back together. I'm pretty sure I have ADHD but have never been medicated or diagnosed. I'm not good at sitting still. My brain will start to race and do crazy things if I'm not busy. Beading has helped me to process a lot of the traumas

in my life and has helped me to literally stitch myself back together. I was traumatized when my daughter fell out the window. Sundancing, prayers, beading her mukluks and doing beading as the giveaways was part of me being able to process that trauma. The act of making and giving things has made a huge impact on my ability to process those traumas and the damage that it did to me. I feel like it gave me a way to control it. When my life felt incredibly out of control, it was very orderly. It's very much like pulling things together. It gave me a sense of order in my life. And I think it made me a better parent too because I was able to process all those things and still be fairly present for my children when I was in a fairly traumatic situation.

I just think beading is amazing and exciting and I wish it was something offered in schools to every kid, not just Aboriginal kids, as part of a life skill. I think that gardening and sewing and those kinds of real-life skills should be offered. But I also think it should be offered as part of social work or higher learning programs where instead of talking about culture or ceremony as a separate thing, we look at how it impacts our everyday lives and the things we do. And not just seeing beading as ceremony, but for some people its knitting, sewing, or crafting wood - all of those kinds of tactile things that I think are probably being lost a lot in our culture. It's finding those different ways of connecting with yourself and with other people.

### **Roberta's Beading Story**

*Roberta runs an online group she created to share information on local Indigenous cultural activities and events. When I asked if she could share my recruitment poster through this group, she asked if she could participate in my research. Roberta shared her beading story with me at her home on March 5, 2019.*

I'm not very versed in any type of Indigenous culture. I'm very, very new to it. I've always wanted to know about it but it's like, no one will teach me. I got tired of waiting around to find someone to teach me. There's so much stuff online now. People are offering this stuff out. I thought, I'm just going to try it. I'm just going to go out and meet strangers and try this because no one's going to do it for me so I'm going to help myself. The thought I had in my mind when I started was that I wanted to learn so I could teach other people because I know how hard it is to find somebody to teach this stuff. I know I'm not the only one. There's a lot of people I know that have Indigenous background but have no knowledge of their culture at all. They just live day to day, trying to survive and they're just trying to find their way.

I might look Indigenous, but I don't feel it. My dad's side is Caucasian, and I feel more connected to them because I knew their background. I know nothing about my mom's side. My mom does not want anything to do with her culture. She says, "it's just not for me." She grew up in a hospital most of the time and had kids young. She's more faith based. I just don't believe in religion. I believe in culture because there is a place for everybody. I think as a human, you know your rights and wrongs. You treat people the way you want to be treated. I think that's just the normal rules of life. A lot of my mom's sisters and brothers were in the 60's scoop so they're adopted out. Two of them I found on Facebook. They don't talk about their past. They're very quiet. I'm very close with my mom's oldest sister. She was adopted when she was probably a baby and knows nothing about her culture at all. She grew up in the states. To get her to come here and even talk to me about anything from the past, it's hard. I offer all the time for her to come here and I'm hoping one day she says yes.

I only knew I was Indigenous because I looked that way. That's the only thing that connected me to my culture. That's it. I really want to know where I come from, who I am,

what my ancestors did. I hated that the only people I knew about was my dad's side. I was like, why? It's such a beautiful culture but no one wants to share it with you. It took me a long time to understand that they lost all that. They don't have it either. I used to think, you guys all know this stuff and you're hiding it from me. That's what I felt like. When I understood their life and the things they've gone through, it helped me to be more understanding and empathetic because I didn't realize how hard it was. I get why they don't understand, but now I have to search strangers to find out, which I'm willing to do. I want to know.

Beading opened up the door to everything for me. It gave me confidence to find out for myself. Somebody teach me something because I'm just starving to know! I feel like I'm walking in the dark. I think a lot of it is because I don't know who I am, so I just kind of created myself. All my life I've been doing that. I didn't get raised with my mom. I lived in foster homes since I was eight. My sister and I got separated. She stayed in a foster home until she was eighteen. I lived on the street and grew up in group homes. I did really bad shit when I was younger and then couldn't wait to turn eighteen because to me, it was like starting my life over. I was like, once I'm eighteen my shit's going to straighten out, I'm going legit and I'm going to do everything in my power to do that. And I did. But I was working so hard to get ahead, now I'm ahead it's like all my skeletons in my closet just went – whoosh! And I had the wickedest anxiety ever in my life. I locked myself in my house for almost a week. I started shaking and didn't know why. Every time I would try to go outside, I'd get terrified and I would run in. I blindfolded myself and I went to the doctor. I said, I just need help. I can't stop shaking, I can't sleep. This has been going on for days. I'm suffering. She gave me this medicine and it took about six days before I stopped shaking. I started getting better and I thought, I definitely need to do something about this. Something in my mind needs to relax because I don't think my brain

shuts off and that's my problem. I went to a clinical psychologist for a bit and they pretty much told me, "you have severe PTSD. You're used to your adrenaline going so high all the time that you can't stop it anymore." I'm always full steam ahead. I don't know how to stop and when I do, I freak out. I panic. I'm so used to running my life that way.

I was looking for things to try and occupy my mind instead of working myself to death. I was trying to think, when's the last time I felt better? I thought, when I do things for other people without being asked to, it makes me feel really good. There was this girl online and she does art and teaches beading and sewing and she does leather crafting. About a year ago she was teaching a basic beading class in Winnipeg. I took her class with my husband and we made a medicine bag. I really liked it. It was just good energy and a lot of good people around. I asked if she did private classes. She was more than willing. She's said, "I'll do a private lesson with you, but the thing is you got to drive out to Libau." Wherever. Tell me wherever I have to go. I'll go.

People are weirded out when I tell them the person who taught me is actually Dutch. She's not even Indigenous, but there's a lot of Indigenous people who have taken her class because I've been in it. I couldn't ask for a better teacher - so patient and kind. We can talk about stuff on the heavy side, we joke around and she goes through the same things I go through, but on a different level. We can connect, even though culturally, we're not the same. And she feels the same way when she does her beading. She gets a lot of guff because she's not Indigenous. I think it doesn't matter what race she is. She's connecting people. She's giving them a positive environment to do these things in. We need more of that in this world. If people shared more often, created those environments and just included everybody, people would feel more welcome to share and teach each other what they know. Everybody knows a little bit of

something. My whole point in learning this stuff was to one day create an environment I can do that in. Just include everybody and say you're welcome to come here. I want people to feel that way.

I didn't realize until about the second beading class, every time I left there it felt like my mind had a rest. I felt like I had a huge nap, woke up, and was just totally refreshed. I thought, oh my god, this is it. This is what I've been looking for - for my mind to just relax. I felt reset and I didn't have to talk to someone about all my problems to feel that way. After that I was like, I want to learn more, I want to do more. Now I want to do it all the time. I've learned that I don't bead when I'm frustrated because I don't want to put my energy into it. I find when I feel good, it's just better. It comes out better and my mind actually feels rested when I do it in a good mood.

A couple times I was beading by myself and I was crying, just tears coming down my face. It's almost like I just let go of my hurt. I let go of anything I was angry about, anything that really deeply hurt me. Not often that happens, but sometimes. And I don't think it's putting bad energy into it. I think it's letting go of my hurt without actually having to spill my guts. I didn't know how much power that beading had in it until I did it. I couldn't believe how good I felt. It's like a different world opened up to me and I just love the world it created. That's when it kind of opened the door for me wanting to experience different things.

We have this group called Stitch n' Bitch every Friday. It's for whoever wants to come and you just sit there and work on your unfinished projects. I drive out to Libau every Friday and when I go out that way, I feel like I'm home. I've never felt like that driving anywhere and I've been all over western Canada. Libau is close to Scanterbury, maybe twenty minutes away. My mom is from Scanterbury. She still knows people there and showed me where she grew up

and where she was born, but she doesn't go there unless I take her and it's very rare that happens. She just doesn't like being out there at all. I spent maybe six months of my life there at one point but never grew up there. Everything's such a blur but I remember the things that happened out there. I was very young. Every time I drive out there, I feel like I'm home. I feel like I belong there and it's calming. I don't feel like I'm going to a destination. I feel like I'm just calm where I am. When I go home, it just feels so relaxing. I'm in my car, I don't feel stressed. I enjoy the drive. I enjoy the scenery. I just love it. I just need that five hours to clear my mind. I look forward to it at the end of my week. I think it's like a need. It's the need to have a break in my mind. It's just five hours in a week for me only. I can't wait to go there and see all my friends and see what they're working on. I get to work on my stuff and for the most part, we just talk and joke around. All kinds of emotions are in there. It feels good to sit with other people and do something you love. You feel like you belong somewhere. And no matter what I've done, I've never felt that way. I feel like I'm at home. It's amazing.

The very first thing I ever made was baby wraps for my girlfriend's baby (Figure 11). I've been friends with her a long time. We're not tight. We're not best friends but I love her like



*Figure 11.* Roberta's first project, baby wraps.

a sister. She's gone through such a hard time in her life and a lot of those heartaches I shared with her because I've either gone through it myself or watched her go through it. She's forty-two and just had a baby. I know it's something she's wanted forever. I wanted to give her something that was truly from my heart to show her like, you did great. You did so good. You made such a beautiful baby. I put all my heart into it. I felt like I couldn't have given a better gift to somebody who deserved it so much. When I see her wear them, it just warms my heart. It made me feel amazing and I wanted to do that all the time. I just feel really good when I give to somebody.

Beading gave me more confidence to go out and ask questions. I think a lot of the time I was scared. I'm finding I don't feel so much of a stranger when I go ask people about culture because I feel like I'm doing something to contribute towards it. I feel like I'm starting to belong. Beading just makes me feel connected when I'm with it. It feels amazing to be included and to learn about the things you want to know - especially when it comes to who you are. It led me to meet so many really awesome people who knew things I wanted to know about. I think if I carry this on, those people I'm going to meet are the people I want in my life. It's also helping my family talk about things. They see me going out to learn these cultural things and when I tell them about what I've learned, they're so amazed. It kind of motivates them to want to learn about it too. It feels good when we talk about it, there's just good energy, and I really want more of that in my life.

My anxiety is improved since I've been beading. That is probably the biggest accomplishment of my life right now because I've been struggling with this forever. I'm a very in-the-box person. I don't see nothing outside the box that I'm staring straight ahead at. It's hard for me to change that way. Beading has opened me up to do it and I've never had anything

else do that. The only people who understand what I'm saying are people who've done beading (laughs).

I feel my happiest when I'm beading. My mind feels happy, my heart feels happy, I don't feel tight in my chest, I don't feel like - where do I go from here? I think about exactly what I'm doing in my hands, what I want to create, what it's going to look like. Before, everything is stuck in my head and I just over think it. It's helped me let a lot of things go. I notice I'm not as aggressive about things. I'm not as adamant. I take things with a grain of salt more. I find that I'm learning not to be so hard on myself when I'm doing beading. I've found that everything's fixable. It doesn't matter what it is. It all comes around. It might seem really bad right now, but it will work itself out. It always does. Beading helped with that because you can fix anything you're doing when you're beading. It can look really tight and you just break some beads and it goes back to normal.

It feels like I've been doing this awhile and it's only been a year. I felt like I was constantly searching for something. I know nothing about my culture. I know nothing about who I am, who my ancestors are. I know my immediate family and that's it. I have memories of my grandmother. I have memories of my grandfather on my mom's side. That's all. I don't know my family. I don't know where I come from. I don't even know what my bloodline is. I had to go find these things out and I'm still looking. I still feel kind of lost but at least I feel like I'm not treading water anymore. I feel like I'm getting somewhere. And I have something to contribute instead of just being somebody that's asking questions and wants to know. You have to find a lot of courage inside yourself to ask a stranger questions about something you should know everything about, but that you know nothing about. I would love to know about culture just because I do want to teach other people.

I think beading can bring a lot of things together for people. I wish more people would at least try it, even if it's not your thing. Give it a shot. Doing the beading is a part of me now, a part of my daily ritual, like when people pray every day. I have such a passion for it and I really want to do it all the time. There's just so much you can do with it and I love the freedom to do what you want. No one's telling you it has to look a certain way or has to be a certain way. There's never a wrong answer, everything's fixable. I love that about it. I feel like I'm taking everything that I'm learning about beading into consideration in how I dictate my life now. It gave me an outlet to start learning about my stuff. I never thought giving a gift to someone, or making a gift for someone, would have pushed me to do that. I've made wraps. I'm making gauntlets right now for my husband (Figure 12). I started with smaller beads because I wanted more detail. I followed it off a silhouette. I haven't really made anything for myself. I don't really feel like I need anything. I already feel like I got a gift out of this whole thing.



*Figure 12.* Gauntlets made for Roberta's husband.

### **Tamara's Beading Story**

*Tamara expressed interest in my research after she saw my recruitment poster shared through social media. Tamara shared her beading story with me on March 1, 2019.*

I belong to the Pimicikimak Cree Nation. I'm from Treaty five territory. I was born in Norway House. Norway House was one of the main fur trading posts. That's where my family originated from. There's a lot of identity issues but for me, it's actually an identity crisis when it comes to who I am and how I connect to the land. Because I'm urban it's hard to connect to the land. When I do go up there, I do feel like it's home and I feel connected.

I have a grandmother. Her name's Mary Emma Scribe, nee Rider. She comes from Carry the Kettle First Nation. She was Sioux. I have a descendant coming from Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull through my Kookum. I have a pretty interesting background when I think about it. I guess what happened was my Kookum was pregnant with her daughter and she moved to Norway House to live with her aunty. That's where she met my grandfather Murdo Scribe. My grandpa Murdo was a storyteller. He wrote Murdo's stories. I'm a storyteller too. I could talk forever.

My maternal side comes from Cross Lake. Unfortunately, my mom's parents passed away when she was young, so I never had grandparents there. On my mother's side of the family I believe they were visionaries and herbalists. What I know is that my family – my maternal and my paternal – they had the skill of beading. Of course, its beading that brought me to the journey to understand because there's a lot of things that I do with the beadwork that it just kind of guides me, but I'll get into that later.

I left the community when I was four and I came and lived here in Winnipeg. I never understood my language to begin with because my dad was residential school impacted. At the time, my grandmother who lived in Norway House thought it was a good idea to send her children to the residential school because they were gaining education. I guess she wanted her children to be competitive. Growing up I wasn't really taught my language, Swampy Cree. It was mainly English, and I think the main reason why is because they didn't want us to have that language barrier when it came to growing in society. To me, that's devastating.

I went through a huge healing journey. I'm still on that journey. It had a profound effect on me. I went through culture shock when I went to university. I have an active mind. To concentrate, I found doodling was the best. I was able to stay focused. I just got addicted to making flowers. I noticed when I go back and review my work, I would just see flowers upon flowers on every single page. One day I had a fallout with this guy I really liked. He broke my heart and I was affected by it. What I did for myself is I drew a flower every day. I was pretty amazed how I was getting good at it. And I was like, I want to bead these one day. We went to my dad's friend's place in Ocean Man Saskatchewan and his wife was very good at beading flowers. I was blown away because I actually saw that somebody was beading flowers. That's when I said to myself, I want to bead one day. I'm going to bead one day but I don't know how.

The beading journey began when my Kookum passed away. I had a lot of regrets when she passed. Poverty got the best of me and I never had a chance to go spend time with her. I felt really bad about it. When she was passing away, we spent a week over there. She was a gardener and I started to look at her flowers that she had in her garden - those flowers were dying. I wanted to take something to remember her. I remember when I'd visit her, we'd be looking through old pictures of the family. But this time, grabbing that photo album there was

no pictures. Everything was gone. Her place was pretty much empty, but there was a flowerpot that was left. There were no flowers in it, just dirt. We started watering and then all of a sudden, this spider plant started growing. We still have it today. That was four years ago. I don't know if you believe in spirituality, but I took that as a sign.

At her burial they did the cutting of the hair ceremony. I had a cut bob and I felt so bad that I couldn't cut my hair because it was short. So I said to myself, I'm going to grieve my Kookum in my own way. I'm going to grieve for four years. I was a year into my grief when I had this dream that I was on Portage and Main and all our family members were gathered around. All the family members were singers and pow-wow dancers and I was harmonizing along. It was like a pow-wow grand entry and my Kookum came dancing in her outfit. She was a traditional woman's dancer. I can just see her fringes swinging. There was a bright doorway and my mom was holding that door.

I ended up at a pow-wow. At Manitobahbee they had the Teri bead shuffle - hundreds of women diving for beads. As I was ready to dive, I guess somebody stepped on my foot and my foot came flying out of my sandal. I was caught off guard by it. I was trying to put my sandal on properly and I was in a rush because everybody was freaking out. All of a sudden, these vials of beads started rolling towards me and I just grabbed whatever I could. I grabbed four of them. Two of them were pink and blue, the exact same colors as the fancy dance outfit my Kookum made me when I was a little girl. I thought about Kookum right away and I said, "Oh I guess I should start beading now." I had another dream of my Kookum the week after. We hugged and I got to feel her old skin. She was soft. She looked how I remembered her when I was a dancer. That's when I started realizing that you're going to retrace your footsteps, your ancestry eventually.

Somebody's always passing away. That's a big significant thing about my beading story. I also believe in Jesus. When I lost my cousin Nancy in 2016, I had this cross. I had found this cross and prayed with it for many years. I really believed in that cross. It was meant for me to believe because during that year, I found crosses everywhere. I found a white and gold cross. I wish I had it, but I gave it to my cousin Nancy, and I don't know what she did with it. When we buried her, that was probably the darkest time in my life. I was not well. I was in a bad place. I had to take time off work and I was at home one day crying, grieving. I was like, I don't have a cross! What am I going to do? I thought, Okay, I'll bead one. It felt like it was Nancy, saying, "here make these crosses because you don't have one. I have your cross." She knew I had a lot of faith, so I started making the crosses.

I prayed every time I beaded and took every bead as a prayer. I spent a lot of time with myself. I started thinking about my Kookum a lot. I started wishing that I had a Kookum. I grew up in ceremony, going to sweat lodge, and I remember a lot of those teachings. I could never really connect them to real life situations. They were just memories, stories. I guess when you get older, go through your life's journey, and you're learning about your identity and yourself, then you start to reflect on things like that. I'm starting to reflect on how my life would have been with my Kookum, if I'd had that interaction with her. I started to remember what I would want from my Kookum, and then the flowers started to really come. That's how I started the Kookum collection.

They are all story medallions. They are all flowers and the reason why, is because the flower is basically a connection to the spirit world. Maybe this will explain – my spirit name is Keewatin Nutin, which means North wind. I call myself an anthomaniac artist because I was obsessed with flowers. An anthomaniac is a person who is obsessed with flowers. I thought

about this while I was drawing them. I also came up with a story. The story is about a flower that grows alongside the Nelson River in the boreal forest and her name is Keewatin Nutin. I named the flower from my spirit name. She returns to the boreal forest every spring and summer. For me, I always leave the community to come live in Winnipeg and when I go back, it's normally in the summertime. The flower returns, grows, but dies when winter comes. There are phases of the weather like winter, spring, autumn, summer, and in turn, those stories can tell you about the land. Basically, it's my spirit trying to reconnect to the land and reconnecting with my identity.



*Figure 13.* Keewatin Nutin on the rapids.

This gold, purple and navy one was the first one (Figure 13). I wanted to make it look like she was swimming. What happened was, she got picked and went on a ride on the rapids of

the Nelson River. That's why it's spinning. When you look closely, you can see the color like water. Then I did the twisting of the lanyard to represent the whirlwind. There's a story when it comes to the wind. There's north, south, east and west wind - and their sibling, whirlwind. This is honouring the whirlwind. Whirlwind's the one that spins and is there to create chaos. Sometimes in your life things have to be chaotic in order for things to fall into place.



*Figure 14.* Berry picking with Kookum.

This one is called Berry Picking with Kookum (Figure 14) because I never got to do that with my Kookum. There are four berries. There's a puberty ceremony when our women get their moon time and the berries are connected to that. When you look deep into the lanyard, you'll see little pieces of black and green. That's supposed to represent the pail and the dirt.

This one is because I got into the exploration of wishing I had my Kookum (Figure 15). This middle flower is supposed to represent me and how we can look at our place in generation.

The outlining of the flower is my mother who is an influence. Without her I would have no color. At the same time, on the outside here - that's my grandmother. In order for my mom to have this color, she gets it from my grandmother. It's my grandmother and my mother that bring the color in my world. That's the generations. It's like you're remembering their teachings, the



*Figure 15.* The generations.



*Figure 16.* Fire in the sky.

connections. These are things I wish I had, because I never had opportunity to meet my Kookum.

This one's called Fire in the Sky (Figure 16). It's kind of deep. It's kind of dark. It's death. The black represents the coffin, where my cousin lies under the skies of the boreal forest. The color is a fire sunset. Those are the sunsets that you would see in the boreal forest. This was healing because I was grieving badly at the time. Without darkness there's light. It's the dark that brings out the beauty in this medallion. To me this is like a peaceful flower sitting there looking at the sunset. At the time I was thinking more of my cousin so it's not so much my Kookum, but I added it to the Kookum collection.

This one is honouring the bull frog (Figure 17). My dad had a massive stroke. I watched what he went through and it made me understand more about the frog. There's a story about the frog in my grandpa Murdo's story and that picture of the frog was scary to me. This is supposed



*Figure 17.* Honouring the bull frog.

to represent strength because the frog freezes in the winter and stays like that. It was just like my dad. He had to stay still. He couldn't move because he was in a massive stroke state. He had to stay like that for a very long time. That's when I started understanding the frog spirit.

These are LGBTTQ wedding medallions (Figure 18). That's why there's a pair. I looked up the September flowers because they were getting married in September. Gold was the dandelion and there's the pride rainbow. The stem represents their bond. The leaves represent



*Figure 18.* The married couple.

their two dogs. It's supposed to be like storytelling because lately a lot of young kids are coming out and there's a certain way you have to approach it because in our community, a lot of young people are coming out and then sometimes they'll commit suicide. I learned how to respect the LGBTTQ community and to accept them and this is meant to represent that.

I never had anybody show me how to bead. My sister showed me a little bit, but YouTube technology taught me a lot. Then I started to go big. I was showing off because I was so proud that I was able to do it! I guess I started becoming known as a good beader because

people started asking me to bead them stuff. When somebody wants beadwork from me, I can see it in colors. I can see and feel their color. I don't plan ahead with colors. I just bead. All of a sudden, beading became a way to make money. I started to realize I can pull money out of thin air. I can see something in my mind, grab it, make it tangible, sell it, and make money to support my family.

I did a draw. I made a Winnipeg Jets medallion and sold 25 squares for \$10 a piece. I fundraised my first \$250 for the beadwork materials for my leggings and cape of my traditional outfit. I'm going to create my travelling and knife bag. I can see it in my mind already. It's going to be a replica of my Kookum's. I know it's going to take a long time, but it's connected to my Kookum. It's also going to be a teaching tool because the teachings come in there like humility, love, courage, everything goes into it. To me, it's my healing journey. Beading is a gift. It's coming from my Kookum.

### **Crystal's Beading Story**

*Crystal contacted me after seeing my poster displayed at the local Winnipeg Trading Post. Crystal shared her beadwork story with me on April 9, 2019.*

I didn't live in Winnipeg my whole life. When I was six my dad moved us back to Peguis First Nation where we're from. I went to school there from grade 1 until grade 12. When I was in grade 6, we got to go into Home Ec. class which was run by this really wonderful woman who was Ukrainian. She wanted to introduce some traditional art forms and one of the things she introduced was beading. She wasn't knowledgeable in that area, so she got another Indigenous teacher from the community who came in and taught us. It was the first time in my

entire experience in a First Nations school, on a First Nations community, where we ever did anything like that. So even in my community, surrounded by other Indigenous folks, that wasn't just something we grew up doing. It was the first time I was ever exposed to it and I remember thinking, why are we doing this? What is the significance of this? The teacher talked to us about the settlers coming and the trade and how we used to do this before beads even came. I just remember thinking, this is inside of me, right? At the time I didn't know this but now, with more experience, that's blood memory. That's in my DNA. Being resilient is also in our DNA. I think that beadwork is part of that.

In grade 9, same Home Ec. teacher wanted us to make moccasins. I took this beadwork home to finish and my mom was like, "I know how to bead." But I'd never seen my mom bead in my life. I was 14 at the time. She was taught by her mom, and her mom was taught by her mom. It's this long line of Indigenous women in my family that were taught to bead by their mothers, but somewhere along the line that got lost. I think the disconnect happened with my mom. She never taught me so when I brought it home, I think that opened the door for her to share what she knew. I was beading and she says, "where did you learn to do that?" I said, "I learned at school from the Ukrainian teacher." So she says to me, "that's not how you bead," and my mom showed me how to do it in the style she learned from her mom. I think this Ukrainian teacher kind of planted those seeds for us and I'm really grateful but I'm also really sad that it had to be someone who's not Indigenous who did that for me. At the same time, I'm glad my mom could teach me. And then my gran picked up beading again. It's created a stronger connection and something that we can share and take a lot of pride in together. This is probably one of the best things that has happened for us. It's helped to bond us.

I left my community and lived in Winnipeg for about ten years before I picked up beading again. Part of that was because I didn't know this was like a valid form of art. When you see Indigenous works of art or Indigenous clothing in the city of Winnipeg where it's really racist, it's difficult to be putting those things on because then you're targeted. And for my safety, I didn't engage in that. It makes me really emotional now because there's a lot of shame in that.

In the last five years, I've picked it up again and started doing some really meaningful work. Now it's part of my self-care routine. It helps me connect with my mom and my granny, but it also helps me connect with a larger group of Indigenous people. I feel part of a community. I'm able to connect with other people when I see them wearing their beadwork and proudly representing. It just makes me feel so much safer now that I can do that. My mom and my granny live in Peguis but there's always going to be that connection because they have pieces I've made so they can carry me with them. Even if I can't be there with them.

I think now that I've beaded some significant pieces that have a lot of meaning, it's helped ground me in my culture as well. I beaded some pieces for my daughter's berry fast. When a young girl transitions into womanhood, the marker for that is her first moon time. From that first moon time until her thirteenth moon time is a time when she engages in a berry fast. She abstains from eating berries, doesn't hold babies, doesn't take any gifts and receives women's teachings. After 13 moons, my daughter broke her berry fast by having a ceremony where she was presented as a young woman and no longer a child. When she came out, she was wearing this beaded regalia I had made for her (Figure 19). As I was beading it, I kept thinking, people are going to see this on her and they're going to know that she's strong,



*Figure 19.* Beaded regalia pieces: Crown (top), necklace (middle) and hair ties (bottom)

that she's proud, and that she's humble. All of those things that the beadwork I made for her represented, is all of the stuff I didn't feel for myself when I was that age. I had no idea what it meant to connect these beautiful things with who I was as a person. So I made her something that represented who she was, to show her that I'm doing this entirely from love and that this is a part of connecting with her culture, her name, and still being a modern Indigenous person.

That's something I really love about all the beadwork I see now. People are repping all the time. They have their earrings or beaded shoes and purses, and I just think, twenty years ago this didn't happen.

I made a necklace (Figure 20), crown, earrings and hair ties. My daughter's



Figure 20. Beaded hawk necklace.

traditional name is *Ashitay Giiziko Keghek*, which in Ojibwe means flying through the rays of the sun hawk. As you go around the crown (Figure 21), each circle is that sun rising, there's mid-day where it's the highest in the sky, and then all the way back again. Through each one there's a hawk flying through those rays. The style of beadwork is modern. All the colors in her



Figure 21. Beaded Crown: Flying through the rays of the sun hawk.

beadwork are the colors she received from the medicine man. She was only two weeks old when she received her name and colors. As I made it, all I could think about was how proud I was of her for going through that process, and that she wasn't ashamed to put these things on and wear them. I think because I was able to create this for her, it opened that door for her to be proud of who she was. That made me really happy because sometimes I wished that it happened for me. Maybe if my mom hadn't gone to residential school, she would have been able to teach this to me, and we could have represented every single day in this way. This would just be a part of who we are, rather than just something you see on a special occasion, like at a pow-wow.

One of the things I'm working on right now is beading my treaty card. I personally have a big problem with treaty cards. Why do I need to show you a card to prove that I've been colonized? It's a bone of contention with me. I took my treaty card, blew it up a little bit bigger and I'm going to bead it with my image on it. That's an act of resistance and an act of decolonizing. I didn't want to make it the size that fits in a wallet because it's hidden away like they've been trying to do to Indigenous people for so long – hide us. Whether I'm visually Indigenous or not, I'm here and proud to visually represent that I'm an Indigenous person in my own land. I'm fair and I don't have an accent as much as other people do. People don't think I'm Indigenous but if I can represent in some really visual, in-your-face, beautiful way then let's do that. I think that beadwork can do that.

This one is part of a graduation gift for my friend (Figure 22). She's doing her master's in education and wants to introduce Indigenous food literacy into Manitoba curriculum. This is the first part of three in a series, so it tells a story. This is a woman, a teacher who is looking to pass on Indigenous food literacy and sovereignty. I didn't give the woman a face because I wanted it to be all women as holders of knowledge. The plants that are around her and touching



*Figure 22.* Story medallion: Indigenous food literacy and sovereignty

her in spots represent what's inside of her. She knows this stuff. She has this knowledge. It's in this circle because it's all connected. All three of them are blue in the background because it represents both sky and water. Water is life, but sky is a connection to Creator.

There's some Metis influence in here. One of the things I really love in Christi Belcourt's work is she has these little rosehips. I love rosehips. I love to eat them (laughs). They're delicious. Sometimes I think people look at beadwork and think, First Nation only. And that's not true. I wanted to be able to show this style, with this double banding where it's outlined in different colors, is a nod to Metis. I think that is such a significant contribution to

beading. Not a lot of people know this, but you can eat roses and rosehips in the wintertime when they're hanging off the bush. They have a lot of vitamin C which long ago helped prevent scurvy. Then there's strawberries and the first berry that appears in spring – the heart berry. Raspberries are my favorite to eat so I wanted to incorporate that. They taste delicious (laughs). This is saskatoon berries. I've heard people call them high bush blueberries. I wanted to include a saskatoon berry as a nod to my childhood. There are tons of them in my community. My favorite pastime in summer was to take off on my bike and go pick saskatoon berries. Growing up I didn't know the gathering part of it was a traditional thing where people would go out together, pick berries and sing, and they would talk and visit and all those things. I would just go off by myself and do this. Whenever my friend looks at this, she will know the thought process that went into it. This is the scientific part of it that you need to survive. This is the traditional knowledge part of it, this is something that I love, and this is a connection to my past.

In the next part, she's sitting on a hill with her three children and the hill is covered in strawberries under the strawberry moon in June. She's giving those strawberry teachings. She's sharing her knowledge and it's not happening in a traditional classroom. And doesn't have to. It's still valid. This is ancestral knowledge - traditional knowledge, which is just as valid as western knowledge. I think Indigenous people can look at traditional skills like beading and use those skills to be successful in a western world. You have all these westernized skills and all this Indigenous knowledge, so you're a double threat at that point. The third part of this series the woman is standing and offering berries, so it's a transfer of knowledge like, now it's yours. They can take that knowledge and pass it on to their children and the children who come after them. I haven't started that one yet. I'm still working on the second one.

When I did this piece, I didn't put a spirit bead in here intentionally but if you look super close at the blue there's a bead that's not the same. It finds a way. Not everything is perfect. I think that helps us with acceptance. I struggle personally. I'm super hard on myself. Beading has helped me to accept my flaws and realize, Creator has a bigger plan here. I mentioned earlier that beading is part of my self-care. It helps me to slow down, be mindful and pay attention to what I'm doing. And to be really thoughtful about what I'm putting out there every single time. What is the story I'm going to tell? I don't want the integrity of this to be lost when I transfer ownership over. I need them to understand how significant each design is and what went into it. My friend's husband asked me to make these pieces for her and he's going to hang them in their home. They have a large network of friends that spans every culture, every country. There are always people in and out of their house. I just think it's going to be so amazing that all these people are going to be able to see this beadwork and all the story behind it.

I do beadwork (laughs) everywhere I go. That's another part of me trying to Indigenize space. I don't wear a lot of my own beadwork, but I represent by beading everywhere I can - which is something I wasn't able to do before because I didn't have a lot of pride in that. I tried to work really hard to make sure I was safe from things like racism but now I'm just like, no I'm going to do it. Racism be damned and if people are uncomfortable, well guess what? I'm going to claim this space.

I was at my daughter's swimming lesson and I was beading this large leather dress piece. This lifeguard was walking back and forth. Finally, she just stopped and asked if I was beading. She came and sat down. She asked to touch my beadwork and tells me this story. Her mom and dad were teachers and went up north. She would wait at the school for her mom and they would have these community engagement programs in the school. There were all these Kookums

beading and she would sit there and watch them, and they would teach her how to bead. She said when they moved from there, she had never seen it again because she's white and her family didn't practice it. She was just so happy to see that I was doing it. That was the first time I beaded in public. I just thought, that's really significant. I'm being told something here - that this is a good and right thing to be doing. It just made my confidence soar and now I go everywhere and do it. If I'd never done it, I wouldn't have heard her story and she wouldn't have shared all these happy memories and all those things that had been brought up for her. It was so wonderful to hear that from her. It just reaffirmed how I already felt about being able to claim space.

My family is not a family of dancers, we don't engage in pow-wow and we've never really engaged in ceremony and things like that. Just because I bead, I don't necessarily go to sweat. I have a friend who is Midewin and they wear specific things for their ceremonies. I'll bead those things for her, she'll wear them into ceremony, and then explain to me the significance of it. It's kind of like that helper, right? Helpers come in many forms. Some of them are doing the dishes and the cooking, and some of them are beading your stuff. My family aren't dancers, but we make the regalia. When I bead things for people and they wear them into ceremony, a part of me is going into ceremony. For me, beading itself is ceremony. I'm always thinking about that person, I'm praying for them, I'm talking to Creator and I'm asking for some stamina (laughs) and some patience here. Also, just being grateful every single day that even though this came from a Ukrainian Home Ec. teacher, it was also inside of me.

For me, beadwork is often sacrificing something in order to pursue it and sometimes I have to determine priority. Now that I've been doing this for a long time and it calms me down and makes me happy, I make it a priority. I didn't make a priority for those things before.

Beading has helped me to make a priority for other parts of my culture. I'm not Midewin but I made it a priority to make that piece for my friend and then ask and learn about it. I might never be Midewin but I can still connect and learn about her beliefs and specific culture and be really open to that. It's so personal. All of it has a story, right? I'm going to wear the medicine bag you gave me, and I think because you put your spirit into this, I carry part of your spirit. And people carry part of my spirit. That's how we're all going to stay connected.

Reconnecting is healing for anyone. I think part of my healing comes from that. I had really bad anxiety and depression. I was treated by a doctor and it was around that time that I picked up beading and started doing it again. Anxiety is worrying about the future and depression is worrying about the past (laughs), and then beading is like staying in the present. It's helped on my healing journey in those ways. It's given me something to transform my energy from something that is debilitating into something that is moving forward. And from something that is kind of all over the place and scrambled up into something that's very focused. It's helped boost my confidence. I'm hard on myself. I always have been. People's response is always so great and that makes me feel really good and helped me see that I have skills, and I have worth. I'm able to let go of stuff as I give beadwork away. I don't have to hold onto it anymore. I learned how to be mindful, thoughtful, focused and calm while doing this. I am able to share story and learn something from it. That part is done, and I can let it go. I think that's a greater lesson within it.

Something that I struggle with within the beading community is people not being willing to share their knowledge. I think for so long we were told you can't do this stuff, you can't wear your regalia, you can't participate in ceremony, you need to hide who you are. I felt that for a really long time about myself. Now, I'm just like, no. I'm going to share this knowledge. I

want people to know. I'm not going to hoard it. I get why some people might because it was taken away at one point. I'm not going to be here forever. Someday I'm going to pass away and I'm going to take all of this with me, and that's not fair. If I know it, and I know people's hearts are in the right place, then I'm going to tell them. It's going to help people learn all those skills that are going to help them both traditionally and in this western world. It's going to help them on their own healing and reclaiming journeys.

Another thing I think is important about beading is – interpret it in your own personal way. Culture needs to flex and adapt in order to grow and to continue. I think if people can look at beadwork and interpret it in their own ways, do it. Tell your story in the best medium for you. I think it's going to help other people see in a really visual and beautiful way that we are here. We can still connect and still be modern. Whether that is head to toe beaded jingle dress regalia, or a beaded purse or pair of beaded shoes, there's going to be a story there anyway. Represent every way you can. Be proud of it and do it in your own way. I think that's what is going to help this kind of thing survive.

## **Chapter Six: My Beaded Medicine Bag: A Framework for Analysis**

I was very conscious about not making this research all about my own beading journey but recognized that my experiences would undoubtedly influence my approach to its results. I couldn't ignore the beading journey that was happening in my life as I carried out the phases of this research. I also recognize that I am personally located within this research through my beadwork, through the beaded medicine bags I shared with participants, and through the medicine bag I kept alongside me throughout the research process. For this reason, I have chosen to frame my research results within this beadwork. My beaded medicine bag offers a framework through which the findings of this research are organized and explained. The story of this medicine bag also provides context to my analysis and highlights how I am located within it. To begin, I will share the story of how this beadwork became part of my own journey of reconnecting with identity. From there, I will discuss the process of analysis and conclude by introducing my beaded medicine bag as a framework through which the research results are presented, summarized, and then discussed in the following chapter.

### **My Beading Journey**

The story of the beaded medicine bag that I brought with me into the research process acknowledges how my beadwork journey influenced my perspective and approach in analyzing the data. The beaded medicine bag that I carried into each interview connects me to the beading stories that were shared by the Indigenous women in this research. When I began my analysis of the beadwork stories, I still carried this medicine bag with me throughout this process. Its presence reminded me of my ethical responsibilities and kept me grounded within the stories. I was also conscious of the trajectory of my own beading journey that had continued throughout

this process. I know this journey impacted how I approached the data. Kovach (2009) reminds us about researcher reflexivity within Indigenous methodologies, that the researcher's role involves self-reflection in the process of making meaning and interpretation. For me, reflexivity within the process of interpretation and analysis is tied to my beaded medicine bag. This piece of beadwork became integrally connected to my own journey of reconnecting with identity through beadwork. In order to acknowledge researcher reflexivity and the context of data analysis, I feel it is important to share some of the story of this piece before discussing the analysis of the beadwork stories and my beaded medicine bag as a framework.

In August 2019, this beaded medicine bag, along with my Kookum's beaded necklace, accompanied me when I finally made the trip back to Tatanka Najin (Standing Buffalo), my ancestral community in southern Saskatchewan (Figure 23). By then, I had been immersed in completing the condensed versions of each woman's story and was in the early stages of data



*Figure 23.* My Beaded Medicine Bag. Tatanka Najin, August 18, 2019.

analysis. In my mind, it became increasingly important to return to the lands where my ancestors came from, to make that journey home complete. I also feel the Indigenous women's stories were influential in this decision. Hearing the beadwork stories and experiences shared by the women gave me the motivation I needed to further my own process of reconnecting. I will remain forever grateful to Amy, Violet, Roberta, Tamara and Crystal for the gifts of story and beadwork they shared with me. Those stories helped me find my way back to Tatanka Najin.

There were also signs I noticed that told me returning to Saskatchewan was something I had to do. At that time, *Walking with our Sisters* was having its final exhibit of beaded moccasin tops at Batoche, only a few hours away from Tatanka Najin. It was my very last chance to see this exhibit and take part in this important social movement. I felt as though this was no coincidence. Beadwork was leading me back to Saskatchewan but for reasons beyond *Walking with our Sisters*. Beadwork was leading me back to the historical Metis lands near Batoche, and to Tatanka Najin. Beadwork was leading me home.

On August 18<sup>th</sup>, I found myself at the pow-wow grounds, carrying my Kookum's beading knowledges, her beaded necklace, in my medicine bag with me as I stood on the land where she once did. I took a moment to offer tobacco and feel the whole presence of that beautiful place. Tatanka Najin is a community on a narrow strip of land that bridges two lakes. It is a connecting place. Standing on the pow-wow grounds, looking over the lake and holding my Kookum's beaded necklace and my beaded medicine bag in my hands, I came to understand the important connection I was making in that moment. I was bridging the gap in knowledge and the disconnections I had experienced from land, community, culture, and identity by being on the land and bringing my knowledges and my Kookum's knowledges together through beadwork in that space. I was completing a journey but also beginning a new one where beading had given

me knowledge, and confidence to assert myself as an Indigenous woman. Reconnecting with identity through beadwork was something I had now experienced firsthand, in a way that was very meaningful and specific to me. It is an experience I continue to carry, not only within myself, but within my beaded medicine bag.

My beaded medicine bag, like the others, was created to honour the unique perspective and contribution of each participant in this research. My decision to include it as a framework that organizes and informs my analysis is meant to honour researcher reflexivity. It acknowledges my own unique contribution as a researcher, and that my analysis of the beadwork stories comes from my own subjective knowledge and experience.

### **Thematic Analysis**

As previously stated, thematic analysis was used to undertake the analysis of the beading stories shared by each of the five women in this study. This analysis has flexibility as it is not tied to any one theoretical research approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), making it conducive to the analysis of stories using an Indigenous approach. This allows for the possibility of Indigenous worldviews and knowledge being included within the analysis while simultaneously allowing the participant's stories to remain intact.

Thematic analysis is typically organized around core ideas and concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2006), allowing my analysis to consider how themes of identity were woven throughout the beading stories. Thematic analysis and the practice of beading also share similarities in that they both involve the recognition of patterns. Prete (2019) describes how her thematic data analysis mimicked her understanding of beadwork, "as one masters the art of beading, pattern recognition becomes easier to spot and replicate" (p.46). Recognizing patterns within the

beadwork stories through a thematic analysis seemed the most appropriate method of data analysis within the beading methodology chosen for this research. Thematic analysis allows for beading as a way of knowing and doing to be incorporated into the methods of data analysis. As such, I will use the terms theme and pattern interchangeably within the discussion of my analysis and results.

### **Recognizing Beadwork Patterns**

After all participants had provided final approval of their beadwork stories, I was able to begin a more in-depth analysis beyond the brief notes I had made during the process of transcription and story compilation. I began my thematic analysis by going over the printed copies of each beading story line by line, flagging and highlighting themes that were mentioned by all or most of the participants in their stories and which spoke to the experience of reconnecting with identity. I read each story multiple times. I began to recognize how some of the themes I was drawn to were reflective of my own beading journey. Although I had identified a range of themes in my line-by-line review of the transcripts, the struggle I encountered was in how to settle on an arrangement of themes that spoke to the research topic and what was told within the stories.

I also wanted to approach my analysis in the same fashion that Prete (2019) suggested above, by looking at the data in the same way that I might approach looking at patterns within a piece of beadwork. By approaching data analysis in this way, I found that patterns were initially difficult to discern throughout the pages of highlighted text. I believe patterns are best recognized visually and intuitively so I created a thematic map on a wall in my home using sticky notes to place each theme I had identified onto the wall so they could be easily rearranged and viewed together as a whole.

I found myself continually coming back to the pattern of the beaded flower on my medicine bag throughout this process. I hung my beaded medicine bag on the wall next to my thematic map and found that once I did, an arrangement of patterns began to take shape. Bringing the medicine bag into my analysis brought me back to my beading methodology and what I had proposed about where knowledge comes from in beadwork – the heart, mind, body and spirit. I looked to the beaded flower representing wholism, and as I began to go through each theme, I asked myself: *where does this knowledge come from?* Using the flower as a framework, its petals representing the heart, mind, body and spirit, I was able to begin grouping the themes I had identified through my thematic analysis into these categories. Through this process I was able to collapse some of the smaller themes into larger ones and create sub-themes until I had settled on four major themes that I felt had captured the essence of the research question.

Healing was the fifth theme identified and I decided to place it at the center of the flower. This was because it didn't quite fit within the other petals. The experience of healing through beadwork was described by the participants in an all encompassing, wholistic way. This had been my experience as well. It was also a theme that seemed to permeate all the others. For these reasons, I wanted to center healing in my framework and I think this theme found its rightful place within the center of the beaded flower on my medicine bag.

### **Medicine Bag Framework**

My beaded medicine bag is included below as a visual reference to help organize and guide the discussion of the research results in the chapter that follows. Altogether, there were five distinct themes identified within the stories that speak to how beading facilitates connections to identity for urban Indigenous women. Each theme reflects a pattern that was recognized

across all or most of the beadwork stories. These patterns suggest beading as a multi-faceted, action-oriented and wholistic practice that becomes incorporated into urban Indigenous women's ways of making sense of themselves and their place within the world. These five patterns are represented through the beaded flower on my medicine bag (Figure 24).



*Figure 24.* Medicine bag framework

The four petals represent the four dimensions of the self that correspond with the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel - the heart, mind, body and spirit. Each petal also corresponds with four of the identified themes and their accompanying sub-themes which include:

Beading Journeys (spirit)

Sub-themes: Self-Research, Seeking Guidance

Remembering (mind)

Sub-themes: Blood Memory, Grandmothers, Teachings, Place & Purpose

Relationships (heart)

Sub-themes: Land, Family, Indigenous Community, Culture & Traditions

Asserting Ourselves (body)

Sub-themes: Expressing Identity Through Beadwork, Beading Practice as  
Decolonization & Resistance, Continuity

The fifth theme is at the center of the flower:

Healing

Sub-themes: Being Present, Processing Trauma, Wholism, Transformative  
Change

The four petals emphasize the interconnectedness of the themes to one another and to the core underlying experience of personal healing that each woman described throughout her beading story.

## **Chapter Seven: Findings & Discussion**

Identity is about how we make sense of ourselves. It is an ongoing process that according to Linklater (2014) can occur at any point within the cycle of our lives. For Indigenous women who have experienced disconnections with their lands, communities, cultures and ancestors, this task can be complicated. The modern, urban and colonial context that Indigenous women increasingly find themselves in can lead to further experiences of isolation and disconnection. These barriers make it more difficult to connect with those things that are integral to knowing and distinguishing oneself as an Indigenous person in contemporary society.

The purpose of this thesis is to develop a deeper understanding of how urban Indigenous women experience reconnections to identity when beading practices become a part of their lives. As part of this research, five Indigenous women were interviewed and shared their personal experience through stories and conversations about beadwork and beading practices. All five participants shared an experience of disconnection with some aspect of Indigenous identity, and all participants had established a personal practice of beading. The beading stories shared within this research reflect how beadwork became integrated into each woman's process of making meaning of her Indigenous identity through the themes of journeying, remembering, relationships, asserting ourselves and healing. Within this chapter, my beaded medicine bag will be used to frame the discussion of each theme and corresponding sub-themes. This discussion will also draw upon the literature and include several passages from the participant's beadwork stories in order to center the Indigenous women's beading knowledge and highlight how the research findings are informed by their experience.

### **Beading Journeys (Spirit)**

Beginning at the first petal within my beaded medicine bag is the theme of beading journeys which is informed by beading knowledge from the spirit. Each beading story is shared within the context of each Indigenous woman's ongoing journey of searching for specific and personal meaning and fulfillment. It is a journey of self discovery where participants describe seeking out traditional or cultural knowledge, reconnections, personal healing or belonging and validation, which are all integrally connected to the recovery of an Indigenous sense of self. The journey of developing Indigenous cultural identity according to Weaver (2001), is not static, but a lifelong learning process where a person experiences an ever-changing sense of who they are, which may lead to the discovery of new ways of being. Each woman's journey is lifelong, spiritual, unique, distinctly Indigenous, and underpinned by each woman's awareness of colonization and its influence in some of the cultural and ancestral disconnections they have experienced. Important to this, is how beading became incorporated into a journey already in motion and ultimately, enhanced that journey. The women's beading stories describe how beading brought clarity and direction to their journey, allowing them to better understand themselves in relation to culture, ancestors and the greater universe. There were two sub-themes that highlighted important patterns within these beading journeys. They are self re-search and seeking guidance.

#### **Self Re-Search**

For several of the participants, beading became part their journey in doing research that concerns the self. This was particularly true for those participants who shared experiences of not knowing their ancestors or Indigenous culture. Their journeys are examples of how beading is a decolonized way of doing self research. Absolon (2011) suggests the term 'research' carries

negative and colonial connotations. She instead puts forth the term ‘re-search’, meaning to look again from our own perspective and location, using our own Indigenous ways of searching. Beading became part of how the Indigenous women searched for and acquired knowledge about themselves. This was about not only looking within to find this knowledge. It also included connecting with who or what they deemed as important in furthering their journey to understand. Within the beading stories shared, connections to grandmothers, culture, community and healing were what most of the women described searching for in their journeys. Roberta described beading as an outlet to start learning about herself and the ancestors and culture she had been disconnected from throughout most of her life:

I felt like I was constantly searching for something. I know nothing about my culture. I know nothing about who I am, who my ancestors are. I know my immediate family and that’s it. I have memories of my grandmother. I have memories of my grandfather on my mom’s side. That’s all. I don’t know my family. I don’t know where I come from. I don’t even know what my bloodline is. I had to go find these things out and I’m still looking.

Tamara shared that once she picked up beading, she began to realize, “you’re going to retrace your footsteps, your ancestry eventually”. Significant to each woman’s process of self-research was that each was able to realize, in her own way, the potential and power of beading in moving their search forward and answering some of their bigger life questions concerned with who they are, where they come from, or what it means to be Indigenous.

Beading as part of re-searching emphasizes the importance of looking towards our own ways of knowing and reconnecting with ourselves as Indigenous women. It suggests a decolonized way of looking for and gathering knowledge about the self. Violet described utilizing more formal methods of research through genealogy and retracing bloodlines, seeking proof on paper of her validity as a Metis woman. She described her search taking her through several cultural learning experiences before finally finding the right fit through beading as a

much more meaningful way to feel validated and to know her identity and ancestors. Through beading, Violet was able to draw upon her own unique gifts and abilities to uncover meaning in her re-search.

### **Seeking Guidance**

The journey through beading and re-searching also involved many of the women seeking out guidance through teachers, mentors, or in relying on spiritual guides and ways of knowing to support their journey. Roberta and Crystal both spoke directly to the difficulty they experienced in finding people within their own communities who were willing to share beading knowledge. Both women were connected to beading by non-Indigenous women from outside their own communities. This highlights the difficulty that some urban Indigenous women experience in seeking ways to reconnect through beadwork when they have been disconnected from traditional teachers. Both women acknowledged that although their teachers and mentors were not Indigenous, they still played an important role in guiding their journeys. What was important to them, was to make beading meaningful to their own life and experience. For urban Indigenous women, isolation and disconnection from traditional teachers and communities means that we sometimes seek guidance from outside of these places. The pervasiveness of the internet within the lives of many urban Indigenous women also means some of our guidance comes from electronic sources when we don't have access to our traditional teachers. Roberta shared that she began searching online for cultural connections and teachers. Tamara was the only woman I interviewed who was a self-taught beadworker where some of her initial beading knowledge came from searching the internet.

There were also many examples shared within the stories where the women's beading journeys were guided in spiritual ways. They consist of dreams, visions, signs, symbols and

intuitions that provided a sense of knowing and assurance that they were on the right path, that beading is meant to be part of their journey. Violet and Tamara described flowers as a sign they frequently encountered in their search. Tamara describes them as holding a connection to the spirit world and they are featured as prominent symbols within her Kookum Collection. Amy was guided by a vision revealed to her by her two year-old-son who told her that he saw her in another time and place, making beads and being happy. This vision leads her to seek out guidance from her grandmother who basically tells her that doing beadwork needs to be part of her life. Tamara was also guided by visions and dreams of her Kookum and her cousin Nancy who had both passed into the spirit world. They both show her in different ways that beading needs to be part of her journey. Through spiritual guidance, some of the women asserted that they had not actively sought out a connection to beadwork in their journeys but had been guided towards it in ways that are unseen but deeply meaningful and specific to them.

### **Remembering (Mind)**

The second petal within the flower on my beaded medicine bag contains the theme of remembering which is informed by beading knowledge from the mind, or memory. By engaging in beadwork, the Indigenous women experienced a process of remembering. Although all the women recalled memories from their past experiences in their beadwork stories, the process of remembering through beadwork entailed more than simply recalling memories from the mind. For the Indigenous women, remembering involved the recovery of lost or forgotten knowledges, honouring ancestors, recognizing their inherent gifts and their place and purpose within culture. Through remembering, the women describe a greater sense of knowing who they are and how to be within the world. Identity is strengthened through remembering. According to Corntassel (2012), “within a colonial context, acts of remembrance are resurgence” (p. 91). Our continued

survival as Indigenous women depends upon remembering because colonial processes were aimed to make us forget, erase our memories and knowledges, and erase us as people. Beading works counter to colonialism through facilitating processes of remembering. Four sub-themes highlight some of the important patterns within this process. They include blood memories, grandmothers, teachings, and place and purpose within culture.

### **Blood Memory**

Several of the Indigenous women recognized beading as an inherent gift from their ancestors, or as part of a quality already inside them. According to Edge (2011), the blood memories that Indigenous people inherit from our ancestors bind our experiences and teachings in a way that functions to “nurture each individual’s potential in relation to the survival of a collective whole in relationship to the universe” (p.41). Amy and Violet both acknowledged beading as a gift that existed alongside other natural qualities and abilities such as sewing, gardening, creativity and vision. Tamara shared, “beading is a gift. It’s coming from my Kookum”. Crystal described how she understood beading as existing within her DNA, passed down through the bloodline of Indigenous women in her family. Although she didn’t learn beading from them, she believed the woman who introduced her to it prompted her to remember this gift that was already within her. When she brought beadwork home from school, she triggered a collective process of remembering among her mom and granny who began to pick up this practice again. Our ancestors had ways of being that were strong and resilient. Crystal shared a belief that resiliency is also within our DNA and is part of our blood memories. Reconnecting with beadwork through blood memory is not about simply recalling a skill that our ancestors had. It is about drawing upon beading as one of our inherent gifts, in order to realize our full potential as Indigenous women.

## **Grandmothers**

Most of the women who saw beading as a gift said they believed this gift came specifically from their grandmothers. Tamara, Amy and Violet all spoke about honouring and remembering their grandmothers through continuing the sacred tradition of beading. Remembering also involved knowing who they might have been if their relationship hadn't been impacted by loss or disconnection. Tamara's beaded medallions, the Kookum Collection, are part of her process of honouring her grandmother and exploring what life would have been like if she had been more connected to her. She says,

I'm starting to reflect on how my life would have been with my Kookum, if I'd had that interaction with her. I started to remember what I would want from my Kookum and then the flowers really started to come...these are the things I wish I had because I never had the opportunity to know my Kookum.

I believe the process of remembering grandmothers through beadwork highlights a recognition among the participants of the important role of grandmothers in passing knowledge that shapes our identities as Indigenous women. Traditionally, guidance and knowledge Indigenous women receive from grandmothers influences how they begin to understand themselves and their place within the world (Anderson, 2000). Honouring grandmothers seemed especially important when the women had experienced loss or disconnections from them. When our grandmothers are gone from this world, remembering them through doing beadwork acknowledges that their continued influence on our identities extends beyond the boundaries of the spirit world.

## **Teachings**

Several of the women spoke about remembering knowledge, teachings, lessons, or stories through beadwork. This included teachings they recalled from their pasts, or new knowledge and teachings they have realized through beadwork that are relevant within the current context of

their lives and experience. According to McLeod (2007), “while we cannot live in the past, we can draw upon the memories of the past to make sense of our experience today” (p.38). Crystal and Amy described remembering beading as a skill they learned in youth but didn’t reconnect with until adulthood. Both shared how as adults they had more life experiences and a greater awareness of colonization, allowing them to begin to see this practice through a new lens of knowledge and experience. Tamara described remembering cultural knowledge and teachings through beadwork:

I grew up in ceremony, going to sweat lodge, and I remember a lot of those teachings. I could never really connect them to real life situations. They were just memories, stories. I guess when you get older, go through your life’s journey, and you’re learning about your identity and yourself, then you start to reflect on things like that.

Tamara’s beadwork represents her process of remembering past cultural stories, teachings and how they relate to some of her more current life experiences such as grief, loss, and her feelings of being isolated from land and community as an urban Indigenous woman.

The knowledge and teachings the women remembered were also related to recovering their own ways of knowing, being and doing through beadwork. Prete (2019) tells us that embedded within the practice of beading are actual teachings and lessons that are applicable to everyday life. One of these lessons as Roberta shared, is that everything is fixable. She says:

I feel like I’m taking everything that I’m learning about beading into consideration in how I dictate my life now...I find that I’m learning not to be so hard on myself when I’m doing beading. I’ve found everything is fixable. It doesn’t matter what it is. It all comes around. It might seem really bad right now, but it will work itself out. It always does. Beading helped with that because you can fix anything when you’re beading.

Crystal said beading helped her in remembering teachings around acceptance. The spirit beads found within her work taught her to accept her flaws and remember, “Creator has a bigger plan here.”

## **Place & Purpose**

All the beadwork stories touched upon how doing beadwork helped the women realize they have a place and purpose within culture and community. Roberta and Violet both described how they found their place within Indigenous community and culture through membership within their respective beading groups. Finding place within these groups helped them reconnect with and remember their role within Indigenous culture as a beadworker, and the specific responsibilities this role carries. Remembering place and purpose involved a recognition among the Indigenous women that they are meant to participate in culture and make their contribution to it through creating beadwork. This was particularly significant for those women, such as Roberta, who described feeling unfamiliar with Indigenous culture. Roberta shared how when she began to take up beading, she came to realize that “everybody has a place within culture”, and that her specific role involves doing and sharing beadwork. This was a powerful revelation for Roberta who described feeling as though she now had something to contribute. Crystal also shared how she participates in culture and makes her contribution to it through her role as a beadworker:

It’s kind of like that helper, right? Helpers come in many forms. Some of them are doing the dishes and the cooking, and some of them are beading your stuff. My family aren’t dancers, but we make the regalia.

Remembering place and purpose suggests that the women have always had a role and responsibilities within culture and community. Beading is part of their process of remembering and finding their way back to it.

## **Relationships (Heart)**

The third flower petal on my beaded medicine bag is informed by knowledge and connections from the heart and is concerned with the theme of relationships. All the Indigenous

women described feeling more connected through doing beadwork. Connectivity was felt in establishing and strengthening relationships through this practice. Amy suggested beading can be part of “finding those different ways of connecting with yourself and other people”.

Nurturing relationships through beading created a greater sense of belonging. Anderson (2011) suggests that belonging and relationships with culture, community, land and Elders are something that all Indigenous people inherently crave and want. The legacy of colonization was felt within the fractured and fragmented relationships some of the women described within their beading stories. Beading counters the forces of colonialism through its connective abilities. The Indigenous women shared many examples around how beading facilitated or enhanced relationships that were important to their identity and sense of self. This includes relationships held with land, family, Indigenous community, culture and traditions. Each of these patterns will be discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

## **Land**

Several of the women spoke about how beading fostered a sense of connectivity by strengthening or facilitating their connection to land. Land encompasses their traditional and ancestral territories and communities outside the urban spaces of Winnipeg. Roberta, Crystal and Tamara all described feeling disconnected from land due to their urban location. Tamara shared, “because I’m urban it’s hard to connect to the land. When I do go up there, I do feel like it’s home and I feel connected”. Tamara’s beaded Kookum collection tells the story of her spirit trying to connect to the land. By creating beadwork that honours her relationship with the boreal forest and Nelson River that surround her home community, she maintains her spiritual connection with the land despite her physical distance from it. Crystal also acknowledges this

relationship through her beadwork which contains berries, flowers and other plants connected with her memories and knowledge of the land near her home community in Peguis.

Roberta shared an experience of being led back home to the land through beading. While she had never grown up in her ancestral community, she found herself driving through it each week when she left the city to attend her beading group in Libau. For Roberta, it was more than coincidental that beading had led her back to the land near her home community. Beading had brought her to where she was meant to be. She described a feeling of peace and calm in knowing she is beading on the land where she and her ancestors belong. Beading has the potential to strengthen our relationship to land and to lead us back home.

### **Family**

Beading brings family together, creating a space to share knowledge and build connections with one another around a traditional cultural activity. Strengthening family bonds through beading was a pattern recognized within each of the beading stories. Whether it was through gifting beadwork, sharing beading knowledge, or honouring family through beadwork, each woman described how beading brought her closer to members of her family. For Violet and Roberta this involved inviting their family to learn beading alongside them, to experience this practice for themselves. Both women participated in their beading groups with their partners and Violet also invited her sister and uncle into her beading circle. Roberta talked about how her family were disconnected and reluctant to share much about their pasts or talk about culture. When she began to share her beadwork with them, she described how it prompted them to begin sharing and wanting to learn more about culture:

It's also helping my family talk about things. They see me going out to learn these cultural things and when I tell them about what I've learned, they're so amazed. It kind

of motivates them to want to learn about it too. It feels good when we talk about it, there's just good energy and I really want more of that in my life.

Crystal also brought beadwork back to her family which sparked a process of remembering among her mom and granny, bonding her closer to them. All these experiences suggest how beading can facilitate reciprocal processes of sharing among family members, providing opportunities to strengthen family bonds through sharing in culture together.

Honouring family members through creating and gifting beadwork was another way the women were able to strengthen their relationships with family members through beading. Amy and Crystal both created beaded pieces for their daughters that were meant to represent their traditional names and were made with some of their traditional colors. Both women shared how they were able to feel a closer bond with their daughters, and their culture. They were able to create this bond through the physical act of creating and gifting beadwork. Beading also created space for the women to bond with close family members within the spirit world. Tamara created beadwork to honour the recent loss of two important relationships in her life, her Kookum and her cousin Nancy. Through beaded medallions she creates in their honour and the stories connected to these pieces, she maintains a connection to both within the spirit world. Strengthening family connections helps us better understand who we are and our generational place. Traditionally, the influence of family was integral to the development of identity. When family bonds have been weakened through the forces of colonization, it becomes imperative to find ways in which to reconnect.

### **Indigenous Community**

The women also described how beading helped them establish connections within the wider Indigenous community. Through beadwork, the Indigenous women were able to share a

common interest, initiate conversations and connect with other Indigenous people outside of their immediate social circles. For Crystal and Amy, wearing beadwork or seeing Indigenous people with beadwork in public gave them a focal point to spark conversations, connect and share some of their culture and identity with others. Some of the women described tenuous connections within the Indigenous community. For Roberta and Violet, attending beading groups brought them together with people from various other communities who shared their interest in beadwork. Violet described her experience within the beading group:

I'm just more connected. You see more people. You feel like you're in there with them...I was so excited. I think, just to be able to create some of the cultural identities of the Metis and being in there with a lot of the other ladies. You get to see the people there and who has been beading for awhile and you listen to people talk...there's so much shared there, more than just a pattern for this or a pattern for that.

Both women valued the stories, teachings and experiences shared within their beading groups and described how they began to experience a greater sense of kinship and belonging within the Indigenous community through their involvement. Indigenous identity is a function of community and belonging within that community (Monture, 2008). Roberta shared her beading group experience:

I can't wait to go there and see all my friends and what they're working on. I get to work on my stuff and for the most part, we just talk and joke around. All kinds of emotions are in there. It feels good to sit with other people and do something you love. You feel like you belong somewhere. And no matter what I've done, I've never felt that way. I feel like I'm at home. It's amazing.

Finding a place within the Indigenous beading community specifically was also something the women touched upon in their beading stories. Some became more involved and connected to this community through selling, buying or trading beadwork, and by sharing their beadwork online and through social media. Tamara said that it was through sharing and selling beadwork that she started to gain recognition as "a good beader" and establish herself within the

Indigenous beading community. The Indigenous beadwork community has established an increasingly prominent presence on social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram.

Indigenous women have the potential to extend their connections into a wider network of Indigenous people through sharing their beadwork journeys online. Belonging within the global Indigenous community involves not only connecting with Indigenous people worldwide, but also involves supporting Indigenous people around the world and using our “collective power and wisdom to sustain alternative ways of being that are not defined by capitalist visions of the good life” (San Pedro & Windchief, 2015, p.116). From their urban location, Indigenous women can connect, contribute and still feel part of an Indigenous beading community that spans the globe.

### **Culture & Traditions**

Closeness to culture was something each of the women experienced through engaging with beadwork. Beading strengthened their relationship with culture by providing a foundation through which to explore, understand, and be within it. Violet and Roberta were both motivated to learn and do beadwork out of a desire to feel more familiar with culture. Roberta shared how she felt disconnected and estranged from culture throughout most of her life, but was able to begin reconnecting with it through beadwork:

I think a lot of the time I was scared. I'm finding I don't feel so much of a stranger when I go ask people about culture because I feel like I'm doing something to contribute towards it. Beading just makes me feel connected when I'm with it. It feels amazing to be included and to learn about the things you want to know, especially when it comes to who you are.

Crystal said beading grounds her in culture. She and Amy both shared how beading became incorporated into how they participate in cultural traditions and ceremony. Amy created beaded gifts as part of her preparations for Sundance ceremony. She also created beaded mukluks for her daughter, a piece which she described as a culmination of healing from Sundance. The

mukluks became closely tied to her motivations for doing Sundance. Creating them also allowed the experience of Sundance to remain alive and connected to her through this work. Crystal shared her way of being within culture and ceremony through beadwork:

Just because I bead, I don't necessarily go to sweat. I have a friend who is Midewin and they wear specific things for their ceremonies. I'll bead those things for her, she'll wear them into ceremony and then explain to me the significance of it...when I bead things for people and they wear them into ceremony, a part of me is going into ceremony. For me, beading itself is ceremony.

As a youth, Crystal had never participated in her own berry fast or puberty ceremony. By creating beadwork for her daughter's berry fast, Crystal was still able to be a part of this ceremony and experience it alongside her daughter and through the beaded regalia she created for her. She says beading opened the door for her to prioritize culture. Beading is one way in which we can engage with culture every day and nurture our relationship to it. It can also facilitate connections to other cultural traditions and experiences. For example, Tamara shared how her interest in beading led her to consider creating her own regalia so that she can participate in dancing and pow-wows again.

### **Asserting Ourselves (Body)**

The fourth flower petal on my beaded medicine bag contains the theme asserting ourselves. This theme is concerned with the physical realm and the embodied knowledge that comes from engaging with the physical world through beading. All the women shared how they were able to not only express, but assert their identity and their ways of knowing, being and doing through beadwork. According to Metis artist Christi Belcourt (2010), "beadwork is not just simply decorating material goods. It is an expression of a beader's identity" (p.6). This identity is tied to the knowledge and experience, worldviews, values and perspective of the beadworker. The impact of colonization in suppressing Indigenous identity is felt within the

shame, marginalization, and racism that our ancestors experienced and which many Indigenous people continue to face within modern society. Nearly all of the women shared stories where their ancestors downplayed or hid their Indigenous identity, or where the women felt invisible, or insecure and sometimes uncertain about asserting their identity. The women also discussed how beading encouraged confidence and pride, allowing them to step out of the margins, draw upon beading as one of their inherent gifts and reclaim themselves and their voice through this practice. According to Prete (2019), beading is an Indigenous way of asserting who we are that is rooted within resistance and resiliency. Resistance and resiliency permeate the stories and beadwork shared by the participants. Beading and beadwork are ways of asserting that as Indigenous women, we are still physically here and will continue to survive. Many examples were shared in which the Indigenous women expressed, defined and asserted themselves through beading and beadwork. Patterns that will be explored within this theme include expressing identity through beadwork, beading practice as resistance and resilience, and continuity.

### **Expressing Identity through Beadwork**

Beadwork is a visual and tangible form of expression. Asserting ourselves through beadwork refers to how the Indigenous women express themselves through the beaded pieces they create. All the women spoke about creating beadwork with specific meaning and intent that was connected to them personally. Beniuk (2016) describes meaning and intent within beadwork: “with every bead stitched, there is a thought that goes into the material. Every bead placed onto the material represents everything that was being thought about and the intention behind the beading” (p. 164). Within the beadwork shared, meaning and intent were uniquely connected to each woman’s experience, often reflecting their own specific cultural knowledge, worldviews, values and beliefs and the relationships important to their sense of being.

Violet cited the Medicine Wheel as an important cultural teaching within her life. She decided to incorporate its meaning into beaded moccasins she created for her brother, who had very little knowledge or connection to his Metis heritage. Through her beadwork she hoped to share some of herself and her cultural knowledge and beliefs:

I thought, now I have to pick the right colors to put on his moccasins, something that's going to say this is the significance of me making it and the culture coming in...So I beaded a semi-circle and I used all the colors from the Medicine Wheel. I thought, okay, it's not too much and it's in your face. It's discreetly there. It makes people think a little bit.

Crystal and Tamara each created beaded story medallions based on their knowledge, teachings and relationship with land and the natural world. This is expressed through the flowers, plants and berries in their beadwork, the colors that represent water, earth, sky, sun and fire, and the stories behind the intentional choices they made in creating their medallions. The depth of emotion and feeling held within each woman's relationship to land is also conveyed through their beadwork and revealed further through story.

Beadwork can also assert social and political meaning and intent, where values and beliefs can be explicitly or implicitly stated. In storying her LGBTTTQ wedding medallions, Tamara shared how some of her values surrounding the Indigenous LGBTTTQ community were present within this work:

It's supposed to be like storytelling because lately a lot of young kids are coming out and there's a certain way you have to approach it because in our community, a lot of young people are coming out and then sometimes they'll commit suicide. I learned how to respect the LGBTTTQ community and to accept them and this [beadwork] is meant to represent that.

Crystal's shared an example where her position was boldly stated through beadwork. Her beaded treaty card was aimed at asserting resistance and decolonization towards oppressive definitions of Indigenous identity imposed through colonization:

I personally have a big problem with treaty cards. Why do I need to show you a card to prove that I've been colonized? It's a bone of contention with me. I took my treaty card, blew it up a little bit bigger and I'm going to bead it with my image on it. That's an act of resistance and an act of decolonizing. I didn't want to make it the size that fits in a wallet because it's hidden away like they've been trying to do to Indigenous people for so long – hide us...if I can represent in some really visual, in-your-face, beautiful way then let's do that. I think beadwork can do that.

The participants were also conscious of how their spirituality became intertwined within their beadwork and expressed through it. Tamara's beadwork was heavily influenced by spirituality through the dreams, visions and spiritual signs she encountered that shaped the details and story she incorporated into her beadwork. Her beaded floral medallion, Keewatin Nutin and the rapids, reflects Tamara's own challenges in connecting spiritually to the land as an urban Indigenous woman:

The story is about a flower that grows alongside the Nelson River in the boreal forest and her name is Keewatin Nutin. I named the flower from my spirit name. She returns to the boreal forest every spring and summer. For me, I always leave the community to come live in Winnipeg and when I go back, it's normally in the summertime. The flower returns, grows, but dies when winter comes...basically it's my spirit trying to reconnect to the land and reconnecting with my identity

Beadwork is a way of conveying spiritual meaning as well as spiritual intent. Spiritual intent is not always immediately visible. Amy, Roberta and Tamara all discuss putting prayers into their work. Amy shared, "I only bead for love...when I'm beading, I will often think about love and protection and put prayers into it as I'm doing it". Most of the women shared an awareness of the spiritual energy they engage with when they do beadwork, along with an acknowledgement that this energy is a part of them that is embodied within each piece. Careful consideration was then given to ensuring they approached the creation of beadwork with spiritual intentions that came from a good and positive place within themselves.

## Beading Practice as Decolonization & Resistance

Within the beading stories, there was also discussion around the *practice* of beading as a way of asserting the self that is rooted within decolonization and resistance. By reclaiming this cultural practice and incorporating it into their daily lives, the women were able to sustain their Indigenous identities, and maintain their own Indigenous ways of engaging with the world around them. Amy and Crystal both spoke about doing beadwork in public spaces. Crystal shared that she does beadwork everywhere she goes and said this is part of her own practice of asserting resistance and Indigenizing space:

I don't wear a lot of my own beadwork, but I represent by beading everywhere I can – which is something I wasn't able to do before because I didn't have a lot of pride in that. I tried to work really hard to make sure I was safe from things like racism but now I'm just like, no. I'm going to do it. Racism be damned and if people are uncomfortable, well guess what? I'm going to claim this space.

Roberta described beading as part of a daily ritual through which she was able to be within her Indigenous culture and connect with her identity each day. Beading created space for her to determine her own ways of furthering personal decolonization. Crystal shared her belief that Indigenous people can draw upon and assert both traditional and Western knowledges and ways of being through the act of beading. She saw beading as a practice conducive to decolonization, and in maintaining Indigenous identity in response to the pressures faced in a modern, urban, and colonial context.

The practice of beading also provided an opportunity for the Indigenous women to assert themselves economically in order to maintain the well-being of their families. All the women touched upon practices of trading or selling beadwork in their stories. Amy had specific values around beading in exchange for money and preferred to engage in reciprocal processes of trade. Through trade, she was able to obtain other practical items, such as a full set of handmade dishes

in exchange for her beadwork. Violet talked about starting her own business making and selling beaded moccasins to support herself while she stayed home to tend to her husband's health.

Tamara shared: "I started to realize I could pull money out of thin air. I can see something in my mind, grab it, make it tangible, sell it, and make money to support my family." Through beading, the Indigenous women shared how they were able to use their inherited gifts to reclaim their role as providers allowing for greater freedom, autonomy, and independence. As Prete (2019) suggests, engaging with the colonizer's bead and incorporating it into our own ways of surviving is resistance.

### **Continuity**

Continuity speaks to the assertion of beading knowledges across time and generations. It is about the importance of sharing and passing on beading knowledges to ensure the continued existence of Indigenous culture and identity. All the Indigenous women expressed a desire to learn beading so that they might teach, share, and pass this knowledge along to others. Violet, Crystal and Amy spoke about their desire to share beading with their children, and potentially, their grandchildren. Continuity was regarded by the women as an important and inherent responsibility within their role as a keeper of beading knowledge. Violet reflected on this responsibility as both a beadworker and an Elder:

It's usually the Elders that are showing the other ones, right? It's usually the Elders that are passing on the information and things like that, right? And seeing how I'm the oldest daughter, I guess it's for me to take up the torch and carry on.

Roberta said she wanted to be able to share beading and make it accessible to others because she understood from her own experience how difficult it was to find someone willing to share this knowledge with her. Roberta and Crystal both said they understood why people might be overprotective. Crystal said:

I think for so long we were told you can't do this stuff, you can't wear your regalia, you can't participate in ceremony, you need to hide who you are. I felt that for a really long time about myself. Now, I'm just like, no. I'm going to share this knowledge. I want people to know. I'm not going to hoard it. I get why some people might because it was taken away at one point.

Roberta and Crystal also both stressed that Indigenous culture needs to be flexible and adaptable so that continuity of Indigenous knowledges and peoples can be realized. This assertion is also shared by Methot (2019) who said: "Indigenous cultures are not frozen in time or resistant to change. In fact, Indigenous peoples have proven themselves to be flexible and adaptable, especially when confronted with technological change brought about by contact with other societies" (p.254). Beadwork and beading practices are a reflection of this. They have both evolved to fit with the changing and evolving nature of Indigenous culture and identity that has occurred over time.

Beadwork knowledge transcends space and time and connects the women with future and past generations. The knowledge, memories and stories the women put into their beadwork will continue to exist within their beadwork long after they are gone. Beadwork also allows for the knowledge and stories of their ancestors to be kept alive. Embedded within the beadwork stories shared by each woman were also stories of her ancestors and their experiences of both colonization and resilience. Each woman shared some of her ancestor's stories in order to contextualize her own experience of reconnecting with identity through beadwork. Beniuk (2016) says that as part of continuity within beadwork, we need to collectively be committed to sharing our knowledge and stories with each other as part of supporting one another in awakening and healing from colonization. This commitment is also important to ensure that our stories and our ancestors stories remain alive because these stories help sustain our collective knowledge, memories and identities across space and time.

## **Healing (Center)**

The final pattern, healing, is located at the center of the flower on my beaded medicine bag to demonstrate how this theme was intertwined within all the beadwork and stories shared by the Indigenous women in this research. Healing is also linked within each of the previous four themes as the processes of journeying, remembering, connecting and asserting ourselves through beading were essentially healing ones. Methot (2019) explained that for Indigenous people to heal from colonial and generational trauma, this involves regaining identity, repairing self-concept, regaining a sense of agency and reconnecting our minds, bodies, spirits and hearts in order to recognize beauty within, and then extend this thinking outwards. All participants shared experiences of personal healing through their engagement with beadwork. The nature of healing varied and was described in relation to experiences of anxiety, PTSD, grief, loss, trauma, disconnection, and the generational effects of colonization. The women's stories demonstrate beading as an Indigenous and decolonized way of healing that bridges the mind-body connection and instills not only personal wellness, but also cultural wellness. The pattern of healing through beadwork will be explored further through four sub-themes: being present, processing trauma, wholism and transformative change.

### **Being present**

Crystal shared: "anxiety is worrying about the future and depression is worrying about the past, and then beading is like staying in the present". The idea that beading grounds and centers us, anchoring us within the present time and space is of particular significance. It highlights how beading can help women in their struggles to overcome experiences of anxiety, depression and PTSD that keep them stuck in the past and worried about the future. Several of the participant stories spoke directly to this. Through repetitive actions, counting, reflection and

prayer the women were able to remain focused, calm, thoughtful, and grounded when they did beadwork. Roberta and Crystal both struggled with anxiety and shared how their beading kept them engaged and focused in the present moment. Roberta talked about how in that moment, she would envision the finished piece and be able to look towards the future with excitement and optimism, rather than debilitating worry that had previously plagued her. Beading is a mindful practice. According to Archibald and Dewar (2010), creative activities like beading are a way to find peace within ourselves: “if someone is in turmoil, it’s hard to come to that quiet place of concentrating: doing wonderful work with the hands brings the mind to rest” (p.8). Being present through the act of beading allowed the participants to become more consciously aware of the context and space and time that surrounds them. For some of the participants, this had a direct benefit in helping them to cope better in their struggles with anxiety, depression and PTSD.

### **Processing Trauma**

The stories also describe beading as a means of processing trauma. Amy said: “Beading has helped me to process a lot of the traumas in my life and has helped me to literally stitch myself back together”. This is particularly profound because trauma leaves us with a feeling of being broken, like well-worn beadwork in need of mending and repair. When we do seek healing, we often look outside ourselves instead of within. The act of beading helped the participants look towards their own ways of working through trauma and created the possibility for culture and tradition to become a part of how they heal.

For Amy, bridging the mind-body connection through doing beadwork helped her begin to process traumatic experiences. She said beading gave her “the opportunity to focus on something your hands are doing while your brain is putting things back together.” Through

beading, the women were also able to tap into some of their more deeply held emotions and experience them more fully. Roberta shared her experience of letting go of emotional pain when she did beadwork:

A couple of times I was beading by myself and I was crying, just tears coming down my face. It's almost like I just let go of my hurt. I let go of anything I was angry about, anything that really deeply hurt me. Not often that happens, but sometimes. And I don't think it's putting bad energy into it. I think it's letting go of my hurt without actually having to spill my guts. I didn't know how much power that beading had in it until I did it. I couldn't believe how good I felt.

For Amy, the act of beading was incorporated into traditional, cultural and ceremonial ways of asking for healing from trauma:

I was traumatized when my daughter fell out the window. Sundancing, prayers, beading her mukluks and doing beading as the giveaways was part of me being able to process that trauma. The act of making and giving things has made a huge impact on my ability to process those traumas and the damage that it did to me.

Beading also created an opportunity for the women to symbolically let go of negative feelings or experiences they held onto when they gave their beadwork away. This was not seen as a transfer of bad energy onto someone else. Rather, the act of working through and contemplating their emotional pain was a way to transform it into beadwork that exemplifies beauty and resilience. It is these qualities the participants felt were manifested through this process and then passed onto others through gifting and story.

Trauma can disrupt our ability to feel in control of our own lives and decisions because we often have little control over the forces outside of ourselves that cause trauma, loss and grief. The practice of beading helped some of the participants restore a sense of agency. A sense of agency has the effect of instilling feelings of safety, helping us feel less vulnerable and more in control of our lives. Amy shared her experience about how beading brought a sense of order into her life:

When my life felt incredibly out of control, [beading] was very orderly. It's very much like pulling things together. It gave me a sense of order in my life. And I think it made me a better parent too because I was able to process all those things and still be fairly present for my children when I was in a fairly traumatic situation...I feel like it gave me a way to control it.

Gray (2017) also speaks to this: "beadwork allows you to forget the chaotic life that surrounds you, while you create an order with your pattern" (p.25). The freedom in design, the orderliness of patterns, the careful control of tension and resistance in creating beadwork helped some of the participants understand how they are ultimately in charge of their own experience, creators of their own destinies.

Restoring agency and letting go of negative energies that keep trauma alive within our lives helps us become more accepting and compassionate with ourselves. Crystal felt that her beading practice helped her accept her flaws and realize that she is skilled and has self-worth. She said that ultimately, the greater gift within beadwork was that she learned to be mindful, thoughtful, focused and able to share story and learn things about herself through this practice that could be passed onto others. All the Indigenous women also suggested that as they began to experience beading as a healing practice, it became incorporated into their daily lives as part of their self-care practices. Beading provided them with a new way to cope with the stressors in their lives that was rooted within Indigenous knowledges, culture and tradition.

### **Wholism**

I was amazed to witness how the women spoke about their experience of identity and healing through beadwork in a very wholistic way. Among all the stories shared was an underlying experience of disconnection with some aspect of Indigenous identity. For the participants, beading fostered reconnections in a way that contributed towards a more integrated and fulfilled sense of self. Amy described healing through beadwork as "stitching yourself back

together” or pulling those fragmented pieces of yourself back into their rightful place. The women also shared an increased awareness of what they were sensing and feeling in their hearts, minds, bodies and spirits when they did beadwork. Roberta felt healing through beadwork within all parts of her being: “I feel my happiest when I’m beading. My mind feels happy, my heart feels happy. I don’t feel tight in my chest, I don’t feel like – where do I go from here?”

The women’s beading stories drew attention to the wholistic nature of this practice in engaging all dimensions of the self in the healing process. Archibald and Dewar (2010) noted that when Indigenous people are fully engaged in creative activities like beading, “the mind is engaged, the heart or creativity is engaged on a more spiritual level and they are physically engaged, working with the hands” (p.12). They go on to say this helps them to delve more deeply into the issues they are thinking about and working through when they are beading. Beading gifted the participants with the capacity to be more consciously engaged and aware of what they feel and sense internally. In terms of healing, this supports the potential for beading to help participants identify what parts of themselves they needed to nurture and attend to.

### **Transformative Change**

Finally, all the participants spoke about change and coming into new ways of being through beadwork. Through mindfulness and wholistic engagement, beading created the context for insight, contemplation, and self-reflection to occur. Creative practices such as beading stimulate thinking, evokes memory, and allows Indigenous people to develop greater insight that leads to a greater knowledge and understanding of the self (Archibald & Dewar, 2010).

Transformative change and personal growth were described by the Indigenous women as an outcome of engaging more deeply with the self through beadwork. Amy shared how beading, Sundancing, and giving birth to her children were all transformative processes for her that

prompted personal change and stimulated her creativity. She likened beading to “giving birth” where the ideas, visions and knowledge are gestating inside of her. When she is ready, she brings this vision outside of herself and transfers it into finished beadwork. She herself is also transformed through this reflective process. She becomes the embodiment of the strength, healing and beauty held within her beadwork.

The women’s beadwork stories demonstrate how their beadwork changes and adapts as they do. The skills, knowledge and teachings realized through this practice shape their way of seeing and way of being in the world. Roberta shared a powerful example of how her beading practice helped her change perspective and conquer chronic and immobilizing anxiety. On her experience of transformative change, she says:

I’m a very in-the-box person. I don’t see nothing outside the box that I’m staring straight ahead at. It’s hard for me to change that way. Beading has opened me up to do it and I’ve never had anything else do that

According to Belcourt (2010), “each person brings something important to each piece they do. As our cultures continue to change and evolve, so does our beadwork” (p.11). The women’s stories demonstrate that beadwork is a catalyst that promotes personal change within their lives. By taking up a traditional and cultural practice, and implementing the knowledge and skills they have learned through it into their lives, they are able to live a fuller, richer life and begin to restore their Indigenous ways of being within the world.

### **Summary of Findings**

To conclude, I return to the medicine bag framework. The beaded flower on my medicine bag tells the story of the findings of this research. Its petals and center represent the processes of journeying, remembering, relationships, asserting ourselves and healing the women experienced as they reconnected with their Indigenous identities through beadwork. The story of

the patterns within this piece are summarized within the following five conclusions drawn from this research:

1. Beading brought clarity to the Indigenous women's ongoing journeys of self-discovery. Through this practice, the participants were able to rely on their own ways of conducting self-research and find guidance and direction on their journeys.
2. Beading triggered a process of remembering which involved the recovery of lost or forgotten knowledges, honouring ancestors, recognizing their inherent gifts and their place and purpose within culture. Through remembering, the women described a greater sense of knowing who they are and how to be within the world.
3. Relationships important to the participant's sense of self were strengthened and established through the practice of beadwork. This is inclusive of relationships held with family, land, Indigenous community, and culture and traditions.
4. Through beadwork and the practice of beading itself, the Indigenous women were able to use their own gifts and abilities to assert and express their identity and their own Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. This was regarded by the participants as important to the continued existence and survival of Indigenous people and culture.
5. Beading is a decolonized and Indigenous way of healing that instills both personal and cultural wellness. Through this practice, the Indigenous women were able to remain grounded, process personal traumas, become more aware of what they sense and feel internally, and realize transformative personal change.

## **Chapter Eight: Stitching Beads into the Fabric of Social Work**

I have spent most of my 11-year social work career working with women who have experienced domestic violence. Many of the women I have worked with in Winnipeg's inner city are Indigenous. I work in the intimate spaces of other people's trauma every day, but within those spaces, I have also witnessed resiliency. I have had the privilege of standing next to so many women as they gather the strength and courage needed to retell their stories and reclaim themselves and their voices through this process. It is the resiliency I see in those moments that has kept me going in this work. For this reason, I felt it was imperative to do research that draws attention to Indigenous women's resiliency.

Disconnections from Indigenous culture, community, land, identity, and ancestors is an experience shared by many of my Indigenous clients, including myself. My beading journey and my social work experience both led me to my research questions. I have also been guided by a desire to seek out ways to be involved in social justice for Indigenous communities in ways that uphold culture and tradition and contribute towards decolonization and resurgence. This desire has led me towards the beading methodology chosen for this research. The Indigenous women's beading stories and the experience of utilizing a beading methodology have provided helpful insights around how the practice of beading holds important implications for social work. Within this chapter, I will discuss the significance of this research to social work and highlight areas for further exploration within research and practice.

### **Significance of the Research**

This research centers and upholds Indigenous women's voices, their lived experience, and their beading knowledges within the research process, bringing them out of the margins and

into the forefront. It is their knowledge, and their beadwork stories, that inform the patterns in its findings. My beading journey also influenced this research, and I found that much of what the women shared with me validated what I had experienced, and what I had learned from the literature- that the practice of beading is the site of knowledge creation (Bourgeois, 2018; Hanson & Griffiths, 2016; Ray, 2016). It is here where the participants realized the most significant, embodied, and deeply personal meanings. It is here where I uncovered some of these meanings for myself. Beadwork stories and beading methodology are not just about beadwork, they are about our experiences within it.

### **Implications for Social Work**

Historical trauma and the impact of colonization have created tension and resistance around cultural identity for many Indigenous people (Linklater, 2014). Continuity of identity and culture are vital to Indigenous healing and in promoting lasting transformative change not only within individuals, but also collectively (Krieg, 2016; San Pedro & Windchief, 2015). As social workers, it is important to acknowledge that our practices and the systems we work within have also served to divide and isolate Indigenous people from their culture and identity. It is therefore imperative for social workers to identify how to support Indigenous clients in reclaiming and healing cultural identity in ways that counter the settler-colonial social work practices and philosophies that have contributed to cultural and identity disconnections. This involves looking towards traditional and Indigenous approaches to helping and healing and centering decolonization and self-determination in our practices. This research sheds light on the significance of beading in this endeavour. Beading offers a way to reclaim and sustain cultural identity, and to maintain Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in response to the colonial oppressions Indigenous people have faced, and continue to live, feel and experience

within contemporary society. Through this practice, Indigenous clients might identify and draw upon their own strengths and abilities and empower themselves to enact decolonization and self-determination within their own lives.

### **Resiliency**

Centering strengths and resiliency is foundational within social work practice. Resiliency is also significant to maintaining Indigenous identity in response to colonial practices and policies that aimed to eliminate and assimilate cultural identity. When we reclaim this traditional practice that was once suppressed, beadworking is an act of resiliency (Prete, 2019). As demonstrated within the Indigenous women's beading stories, it is a practice that prompts remembrance and recognition of strengths, abilities and inherent gifts. The participants were able to identify and draw upon these inner resources to challenge and overcome adversities and traumas. Beading is an activity of survival, a means of remembering tradition and feeling well (Cuthand as cited in Robertson, 2017, p.23). To the participants, it is a practice that fosters closeness to culture and strengthens confidence and pride in cultural identity. Scarpino (2007) notes resilience is a life-long process, and that it is essential to center the strengths, abilities and achievements of Indigenous women as they are often marginalized, undervalued, and can lead to harmful stereotypes and assumptions about Indigenous women's identity. Beading is a resiliency-based practice that fosters strength in Indigenous culture and identity.

### **Decolonization**

Beading supports the potential for the decolonization of identity. This process requires moving away from an awareness of our struggles towards actively engaging in daily practices of resurgence and renewal (Corntassel, 2012). Beading is a practice of resurgence that is tied to

cultural and personal renewal where Indigenous knowledges, epistemologies and ways of doing are reclaimed. The participant's stories highlighted how engaging with this practice supported the potential for decolonization to become embedded within their everyday lives. Through beading, the Indigenous women reclaimed traditional and cultural ways of exploring and expressing their life and experience within the current context of colonization. According to Corntassel (2012), "how one engages in daily processes of truth-telling and resistance to colonial encroachments is just as important as the overall outcome of these struggles" (p.89). In other words, how we go about implementing decolonization in our lives, matters. It is a process unique to each person's specific experience of colonization and its impact on their life. Beading creates space for processes of decolonization to occur while promoting the preservation of Indigenous culture and identity.

### **Self-Determination**

Self-determination is a concept significant to reclaiming and sustaining Indigenous cultural identity. It is also a concept often centered within social work and concerns choice, autonomy, and "the power to define oneself and to determine one's identity" (Bastien, 2004, p.63). Self-determination was enacted through beading by the participants when they began to adapt this practice into their ways of defining and asserting who they are thereby, challenging assumptions about Indigenous women's identity and experience. Beading also instilled a sense of agency, supporting the participants to draw upon beading as a resource for healing, survival and to support and sustain themselves and their families within a modern, urban and colonial context. Colonization has eroded the role of Indigenous women as contributors to the maintenance and survival of their families. Within contemporary and urban contexts, survival for Indigenous women means being able to navigate capitalist, market systems. By drawing upon

beading as a resource towards self-sufficiency through selling, bartering and trading, self-determination was also enacted by the participants. Beading supports self-determination. In the absence of self-determination, overcoming the legacy of colonization might not be fully realized.

### **Therapeutic Healing**

Significant to social work practitioners are the therapeutic characteristics of beadwork practice that participants described such as mindfulness, grounding, awareness, insight, self-care and wholistic, embodied connections. The Indigenous women saw these beading qualities as beneficial to healing their experiences of anxiety, depression, grief, loss and trauma. As social workers, these experiences are often the focus of our helping relationships with clients. I envision beadwork practices as a resource that social workers might connect clients with, in order to assist them in identifying and establishing their own healing practices that are rooted within culture, tradition and Indigenous knowledge. Beading is a healing practice that Indigenous clients can incorporate into their lives and carry with them outside the boundaries of a therapeutic or helping relationship.

Programs and services that incorporate culture and tradition are becoming more widely used in counselling with Indigenous people and within helping and healing agencies (Linklater, 2014). Traditional forms of culture and art are increasingly being used not only in healing, but also in political and thoughtful ways, sparking activism and revealing hidden histories of colonization and oppression, while simultaneously highlighting resurgence and resilience in the face of these challenges (Farrell Racette, 2017). In considering this, I believe it is also important to recognize that there are existing teachers and traditional ways of helping and healing already in place within Indigenous communities, and that they must be sustained so that Indigenous people and communities may continue to thrive. Linklater (2014) cautions against the dangers of

cultural appropriation and infringing upon the already established roles of Indigenous community helpers and suggests it is more appropriate for practitioners to foster connections and collaborations with these helpers, or advocate for their inclusion in our work within our agencies.

### **Self-Care**

Several of the participants suggested how beading became a part of their self-care routines. As an activity that can be incorporated into our daily lives, beading offers a traditional and Indigenous approach to self-care that holds benefits for clients as well as social work practitioners. While I was engaged with demands of completing a thesis and working full-time doing very heavy and emotionally draining work, I found solace in my beading practice. Doing beadwork grounded me and gave me the space I needed to contemplate the things I had witnessed and experienced, and to work through stress and vicarious trauma. As a social worker I recognize my responsibility to make my own mental health and well-being a priority so that I might be able to help others work towards wellness. Beading became a priority in my self-care. I think this practice can be beneficial to other Indigenous social workers in this way. If we created beading circles to engage with each other as part of doing self-care and debriefing, this might bring about a collective experience of care, support and healing in our work, thereby strengthening our ability to continue to do social work while maintaining our own collective health and well-being. Beading groups and circles that aim to support self-care among social workers can be inclusive of non-Indigenous social workers as well. As Roberta suggested, the supportive environment that is created by beading together is what matters most. Including others from outside our Indigenous circles opens up the possibility for mutual discussion and education around issues such as appropriation and reconciliation. It also creates a safe space for sharing and understanding of differences in culture, values and beliefs.

## **Advocacy**

Beadwork restored the participant's voices, giving them their own platform to initiate conversations, raise awareness, educate others and express their social and political position around issues of importance to them. Beading has been used by Indigenous women to express the impact of oppression, patriarchy, colonization and violence on their lives, families and communities and to advocate for social change (Farrell Racette, 2017, Anderson, 2016). Social workers might consider the potential and power of beadwork to inspire social action in Indigenous people and communities. Advocacy through beadwork is visual, meaningful, succinct and not limited by in language. It is also impactful – consider beaded poppies, beaded red dresses or beaded orange t-shirts pinned to a lapel. They immediately draw attention and initiate conversations and opportunities to educate others on our experiences and our ancestors experiences. Crystal's beaded treaty card had this same intention. Beadwork is a form of advocacy that can be enacted in a multitude of ways. As social workers, I think its important to be aware of this potential when we are supporting our Indigenous clients in finding their voice so that we might recognize when beading might be a fit with their ways of being and asserting themselves. It is not necessarily our role to teach and share beading knowledge. Our role is to take notice, uphold and uplift those voices when they come to our attention, and help our clients make the right connections so that they might use beadwork to evoke change, whether that is on a personal or collective level.

## **Social Work Research**

This research builds on the studies of Bourgeois (2018), Hanson & Griffiths (2016) and Ray (2016) which articulate beading as epistemology, and as an Indigenous method of inquiry in research. These researchers all proposed the practice of beading as the site of knowledge

creation, and placed emphasis on the contextualized knowledges embedded within this practice. Although these researchers and others (Archibald & Dewar, 2010; Belcourt, 2010; Hadjiyanni & Helle, 2010; Edge, 2011; Gray, 2017; Prete, 2019) have noted the interrelationship between beadwork practice and identity, to date, there have been no other studies that have explored Indigenous people's specific experience of identity within the context of a beading methodology. Significant to social work is that beading methodology responds to the historical marginalization and oppression of Indigenous knowledges and ways of researching. It is a decolonizing methodology that promotes resurgence in the use of traditional Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing within research. It is my hope that this research will inspire Indigenous researchers, social work researchers, and especially Indigenous social work researchers, to continue to reclaim beading methodology within their research. I believe there are many questions that might be explored through this decolonized approach to knowledge, not only within social work, but across a variety of research disciplines.

### **Areas for Further Exploration**

The role of creative arts in deepening or enhancing the healing process for Indigenous people has been highlighted within previous research (Archibald & Dewar, 2010; Coholic, et al., 2012; de Leeuw & Muirhead, 2012; Hanson & Griffiths, 2016) but none have considered beading specifically within a therapeutic context. The Indigenous women in this research have suggested how beading is an Indigenous and decolonized method of healing. I would encourage future research to specifically consider beading as an Indigenous methodology of healing, and how it might be incorporated into therapeutic practice with Indigenous clients. Within the realm of culturally-based art therapy, I think this practice has immense potential for further study. From the perspective of healing trauma within the body, beading practices might also offer an

Indigenous and decolonized approach to art therapy, and in helping clients connect more deeply to what they feel and sense internally.

The study makes its contribution by demonstrating the practical application of beading methodology in research. This is an area I hope that future Indigenous and social work researchers might build upon further. As I mentioned within my methodology chapter, this research is but one example of how beading methodology might be applied within research. This research demonstrates the flexibility and adaptability of beading methodology, that it has potential to be applied within research in ways that are as diverse as the researchers who might choose to work within it. I was in the unique position to draw upon my own knowledge and skill within beadwork in order to integrate beading more fully into the research methodology. I believe this research serves as an example of how as Indigenous researchers, we might use our own unique gifts and abilities to ask questions, seek answers and experience transformative change within ourselves through the research process. There are still many applications of beading methodology that we have yet to see and my hope is that this research will open the door for future researchers to consider this methodology within their own research journeys.

### **Limitations**

This research is not without limitations. While its findings speak to the specific experiences of urban Indigenous women in Winnipeg, they may not be generalizable to all Indigenous women. A smaller sample size of five participants was chosen to preserve and maintain the contextualized knowledge and experiences embedded within beading and story. This small sample size is not representative of the diversity among the many Indigenous nations living both within and outside of urban spaces in Canada. This signifies that there are still

beading stories yet to be heard, and that these stories may further enhance our understanding of the relationship between beading, healing, and identity among Indigenous women.

A further limitation is that the research is specific to the experiences of women, which leaves room for the stories and experiences of Indigenous men and Two Spirit beadworkers to be centered within further research. There are currently no studies that uphold their beading knowledge and stories. Throughout my beading journey, I have been fortunate to connect with both male and Two Spirit beadworkers who also have beading stories to share that may further contribute to the findings of this research. Although women are most commonly beadwork practitioners, Indigenous men and Two-Spirit beadworkers also have deep connections to this practice, and their own unique experiences of healing and identity. I believe this is an area of research that merits further exploration, particularly if it were approached within the context of an Indigenous or beading methodology that centers lived experience and beading knowledge with an aim towards decolonization and resurgence.

## **Chapter Nine: Final Threads**

### **Conclusion**

The practice of beading is more than simply creative expression or art, it is a practice that “becomes a part of your life” (Ray, 2016, p. 364) situating it outside of this realm into a distinct Indigenous women’s way of knowing, being and doing that has important implications for Indigenous women’s identity and healing. Through this practice, we may know and connect to ourselves, our world, and our ancestors in a much deeper way. Metis artist and historian Sherry Farrell Racette (2008) offers some insight into the practice of beading: “Through the small actions of our needles, and the careful stitches we make, we create and recreate our world; and through the fine strand of thread and fabric we connect ourselves to our grandmothers” (p.78). Through this practice, the generational transmission of knowledges that are needed to sustain our identities as Indigenous women may be stitched back together.

As I pull the final threads of this research together and prepare to tie them into a finishing knot, I draw upon the memory of my beading journey and the stories shared by the Indigenous women in this research. I am reminded of how this journey and the women’s stories are now embodied within my beaded medicine bag. To anyone else, this might be just a piece of beadwork. To me, this beadwork embodies my journey within this research. I also think about the little medicine bags that I put out into the world and into the hands of the participants. This beadwork links my story within theirs, and together, the medicine bags hold the story of this research. This thesis is the story of this beadwork.

I am also reminded about the critical importance of context order to fully appreciate and understand Indigenous women’s identity and beadwork. Identity is not simple, but rich and

multifaceted, much like beadwork. What we see on the surface does not reflect its full depth and complexity, much like identity. If we only focus on the aesthetical and tangible, we diminish its value and the knowledge held within. This is why context is so critical. Bead by bead, we retell our stories and keep these critical contextual pieces alive within our collective memories. I think the parallel importance of context within beadwork and identity is the biggest lesson I will take away from this research journey. Within beadwork, each individual bead makes up a small part within its larger overall pattern, just as each beadwork story is a small piece of the larger story of Indigenous women's struggles and journeys to reclaim cultural identity and ways of knowing in response to the legacy of colonization. Beadwork is a symbol of Indigenous cultural survival and resilience. My hope is that this research will validate the experience of reconnecting with Indigenous identity through beadwork for others. If Indigenous women continue to thrive through this practice, and this practice continues to thrive through us, we will be able to stitch and create new narratives of Indigenous women's experience and resiliency into the fabric of our collective consciousness.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

# Is Beading a part of your life?

**Are you an Indigenous woman living in Winnipeg?**

Participants are needed to take part in a research study that will explore the connections between beadwork and Indigenous identity

This research will consider how beading practices may support the healing, reclaiming and decolonizing of identity among urban Indigenous women.



## What is involved?

- ❖ Your involvement would include sharing and discussing examples of your beadwork during a one-to-one interview.
- ❖ Interviews will be approximately 1-2 hours in length and will take place at a time and location of your choice. Interviews are confidential and completely voluntary.
- ❖ For your participation, you will be gifted with beadwork handmade by the researcher.

To learn more or to participate in this study, please contact the researcher directly:

**Shawna Bowler**  
**Master of Social Work Candidate**  
**University of Victoria**



\*\*\*For confidentiality, interested participants are asked to respond privately rather than posting publicly

## Appendix B: Consent Form



**University  
of Victoria**

## *Participant Consent Form*

### ***Reconnecting with Identity: Exploring Urban Indigenous Women's Experience Through Beading Practices***

This consent form will provide a basic idea of the research project and what is involved with your participation. Please take the time to read this form carefully before you decide to consent to participate in this research. You are welcome to contact the researcher directly if you have questions or require further details about anything mentioned in this consent form.

**Researcher:** Shawna Bowler, Master of Social Work Student, University of Victoria  
 Email:  
 Phone:

This research is being conducted to fulfill the thesis requirement of the Master of Social Work - Indigenous Specialization program. It is being supervised by Dr. Jeannine Carriere at the University of Victoria who may be contacted at: \_\_\_\_\_. In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria.

#### **Researcher Information**

My name is Shawna Bowler, I am a Master of Social Work (MSW) student at the University of Victoria. I am from Winnipeg and have been completing my MSW through distance education. I am a Cree-Metis woman. My mother's family are descended from the Red River Metis here in Manitoba. Through my father's ancestry I am Cree and registered to Standing Buffalo First Nation in southern Saskatchewan. I am self-taught in leather applique beading and have been practicing beadwork for around three years.

#### **Research Purpose and Objectives**

This study will consider the ways in which beading practices may support the healing, reclaiming, and decolonizing of identity among urban Indigenous living in Winnipeg. It will explore the question: *How do urban Indigenous women experience reconnections to identity when beading practices become a part of their lives?*

This research also aims to:

1. Honor and create space for the knowledge and perspective of urban Indigenous women as they share their stories of beading, healing and identity.
2. Explore how Indigenous women articulate and assert their knowledge and experience through their beadwork.
3. Uphold beading as an Indigenous way of knowing, being and doing within social work practice and research.

### **Importance of this Research**

This research is based upon an understanding of beading as not only an artistic practice, but as an Indigenous way of knowing. Through the process of colonization, many Indigenous women have been disconnected from beading as way of expressing, understanding and sharing knowledge. Reconnecting with traditional forms of knowledge and expression such as beading, may contribute to healing, and may re-establish or deepen the connections we hold with our Indigenous identity.

### **Voluntary participation**

The knowledge and stories you share will contribute to this research. You will be asked to speak from your own personal experience. *Your participation in this research is completely voluntary.* If you do decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this consent form. You may withdraw your participation at any time without consequence, and you do not need to provide any reason for your withdrawal. If you withdraw, any data collected as part of your participation will be destroyed.

### **What is Involved**

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will include an in-person interview with the researcher at a time and location that is convenient for you. You will be asked to bring photos or examples of your finished beadwork to the interview, and to consider examples of your beadwork which you feel a personal connection to, or through which you may have learned something of yourself through the process of creating it. Please note that I do not intend to keep your beadwork or photographs. Your beadwork will be used as a visual reference to guide our discussion during the interview. I will ask for your permission to take photographs of your beadwork and to include these photos within the final written thesis. Please know that you may choose to still participate in an interview but choose not to share photos of your work in this research.

The interview may take up to two (2) hours of your time and will incorporate a storytelling approach where you will be encouraged to guide the discussion and share your stories and experience in a manner that is most comfortable for you. You will be asked to share your personal memories, insights and stories connected to your beadwork, and to consider how your work may be connected to your identity as an Indigenous woman. My role will be to listen and support your process of sharing.

With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. A brief synopsis of the story you have shared will also be created. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript and synopsis once they are completed, and you will be encouraged to review or revise them as you wish before they are included within the final research results. This may require up to two (2) additional hours of your time. If you wish to discuss the transcript and synopsis in more depth, you will have the option of scheduling a second in-person meeting with the researcher at a time and location that is convenient for you. A second meeting may require an additional hour of your time. If you do not feel a second meeting is necessary, you will be encouraged to contact the researcher via phone or email with any feedback or revisions, and to approve the final transcript or synopsis.

### **Compensation**

For your participation in this research, you will be gifted with beadwork handmade by the researcher. You will receive a small, beaded, leather medicine bag containing a bundle of tobacco and sage. This gift of beadwork acknowledges my responsibility and respect for the beading stories and beading knowledge you have shared. If you decide to withdraw from this research early, you will still be provided with a gift of handmade beadwork.

**Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time required to share your story through an interview and to review and revise your transcript. In order to address this potential inconvenience, I will arrange to meet with you at a time and location that is convenient for you. If you incur any costs for bus tickets, parking or cab as a result of your participation in this research, these costs will be reimbursed to you.

**Risks**

You may experience emotional discomfort in sharing your experience of cultural or identity disconnections. To alleviate this risk, you will be encouraged to share as much or as little as you feel comfortable. You will also be provided with information related to locally available, Indigenous counseling supports.

**Benefits**

Some of the potential benefits of your participation in this research include the opportunity to share and explore further, your personal connections to beading, and to contribute towards the resurgence and reclamation of beading as an Indigenous women's way of knowing, being and healing. It is also my hope that your contribution to this research will uphold beading as not only a way of promoting wellness, but as a way of doing research with Indigenous people.

**Anonymity and Confidentiality**

You will have the option to choose whether your name will be published in this research, or if your identity will remain anonymous. If you choose to remain anonymous, all identifying information will be either removed or anonymized, and you will be able to choose a pseudonym to be referred to within the research. You will also have an opportunity to review the written transcript and synopsis of your interview to delete or change any information you feel may identify you, or which you do not want published.

All information you share as part of your participation in this research will be kept strictly confidential. All digital files will be kept on a separate, password protected memory stick and will be stored along with all printed or written materials in a locked container that is kept within my home. Electronic files will be destroyed, and paper materials will be shredded at the conclusion of the thesis process. This will be no later than December 2020.

**Limits to Confidentiality**

Due to the unique and individual nature of beadwork, there is a possibility you may still be identified through the photographs of your beadwork if you have consented to their use within this research and choose to remain anonymous. Please also note, there is also a possibility that if you have been referred to this study by another participant, your identity may be also be known to the individual who referred you. Please take these potential limits to confidentiality into consideration when deciding whether to participate in this study.

**Dissemination of Results**

The results of this research will be documented in a Master of Social Work thesis, shared at an oral defense, and published through the online data base at the University of Victoria where it will become available for members of the public to access. If you wish, an electronic or paper copy of the final written thesis will be sent to you.

**Consent**

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

\_\_\_\_\_

*Name of Participant*

*Signature*

*Date*

**Confidentiality Preference**

Please initial one of the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to be identified by name/credited in the results of this study. I consent to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do NOT consent to the use of my name and wish to remain anonymous.

I would prefer to be referred to as \_\_\_\_\_ within the research results.

**Use of Photographs**

Please initial one of the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to have photographs taken of my beadwork, and I consent to their use ONLY within the final written thesis and for no other purpose.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do NOT consent to have photographs taken of my beadwork.

**Research Results**

Please initial one of the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not wish to receive a copy of the research results

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to have an electronic copy of the research results e-mailed to me.

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to have a paper copy of the research results mailed to me.

Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

## **Appendix C: Interview Guide**

Can you share a bit about yourself and some of the disconnections from your culture or Indigenous identity that you might have experienced?

How did you learn to bead? What motivated you to learn or continue this practice?

How does your practice of beading connect you to your culture and identity as an Indigenous woman?

Tell me about the beadwork you have brought with you today. What is the story of each piece?

Can you share some of your personal connections to these pieces? What influenced them or what you may have learned about yourself through the process of creating them?

How has your perspective/view of who you are in terms of your cultural identity, changed along with your practice of beading?