Inspiration for Healing and Reclaiming Cultural Wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity in a Colonial "Canadian" Context

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the College of Interdisciplinary Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Royal Roads University
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

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July, 2025

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COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the copyediting contributions of Dr. Jo-Anne Muise Lawless to this dissertation.

I would also like to extend immense gratitude to the participants of this research who courageously and generously shared with me their Wisdom on Indigenous healing and wellness.

Abstract

Colonization has profoundly disrupted Indigenous people; it affects a person's wellness, culture, traditions, governance, families, health, lands, and all one's relations. While there is a plethora of research focused on decolonization, limited research features personal decolonization in contemporary life to achieve wellness and Indigeneity.

Through Indigenous research methodology, exploratory narrative methods, and thematic analysis, the narratives from seven wellness experts and seven wellness role models uncovered four themes of the process of colonial trauma healing; 1) the Spirit of Indigeneity call to healing, 2) purging colonial poison, 3) reclaiming cultural wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity, and 4) living cultural wellness guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity. The colonial context creates an inescapable environment that causes colonial trauma, which requires historical and ongoing healing; however, that does not mean Indigenous people cannot thrive or be well in the contemporary colonial world. They certainly can, and this research provides inspirational examples of how that is possible. This study illustrates the resilience of fourteen Indigenous individuals, and documents the reclamation and revitalization of their lives in a contemporary colonial context. In spite of the colonial context and ongoing colonization, Indigenous healing is possible and so is Indigenous thriving.

Keywords: Colonial trauma, Indigenous trauma, Indigenous trauma healing, Indigenous wellness, Indigenous healing.

Glossary

From the data, it became clear that there were distinct definitions that are understood differently from mainstream Western concepts and that reflect Indigenous or postcolonial perspectives. The following definitions are helpful in understanding the results and discussion from this study's participants' perspectives.

"**Addiction.**" Challenging the term *addiction* and providing context that roots "addiction" in trauma has become popular in trauma literature and is widely embraced in an Indigenous context. The work of Maté (2010) and Hari (2018) is well known to some of the people who provide a contrary understanding of addiction. *Addiction* is a Western idea that medicalizes and pathologizes addiction as a disease, inferring and placing the disease as an issue that haphazardly impacts some people, without connecting the disease to the individual and to historical and present socio-cultural context. So-called "addiction" disproportionately impacts Indigenous people, further entrenching the concept and stereotype that Indigenous people are more sick, diseased, vulnerable, and have less willpower to resist substances than non-Indigenous people. Within this context, it alludes to Indigenous people being morally weaker (Hari, 2018; Maté, 2010). The truth is that addiction is not a disease at all. Addiction is a coping mechanism to soothe the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical pains of colonial traumas and the colonial context in which individuals exist (Hari, 2018; Maté, 2010).

All One's Relations. The term *all one's relations* refers to the Indigenous understanding that we are all inter-related—people, land, water, and animals, spirits, Ancestors, and those yet to come. This implies responsibilities and relationships that are significant interpersonally, intrapersonally, and environmentally.

Break the Cycle. To *break the cycle* refers to the first generation no longer using colonial coping strategies (e.g., problematic substance use) as a mechanism of survival from historical and ongoing colonial traumas.

Capitalizations. Capitalization of the terms is a sign of respect for the identities, for instance, *Indigenous, Aboriginal, White, Settler, Elder, Spirit*, and *Ancestor.*

Colonial Cultural Values. Not all Western values are antithetical to Indigenous values, consider *cooperation*, for example. However, there are a myriad of Western values that are antithetical to Indigenous wellness. In this research, when the term *Western values* is used, it means "antithetical Western values" such as independence, as well as values that promote colonization, colonial violence, systemic racism, oppression, and discrimination toward Indigenous people.

Colonial Trauma. This research refuted the idea of naming Indigenous-specific trauma caused by colonial harm as *Indigenous trauma*. The term *Indigenous trauma* assumes and centres the trauma as being inherently Indigenous, but the trauma is not inherently Indigenous. Indigenous wellness is inherently Indigenous, and the trauma needs to be named in a manner that associates the term with the systemic perpetrating violators and not their victims. *Colonial trauma* refers to the systemic, socio-cultural, and systematic wounding and core separation from intrapersonal and interpersonal relations. While related to other trauma, the separation void that is created by colonial trauma is filled with internalized oppression. Like all trauma, the experience is often managed through survival and coping strategies that promote short-term survival but result in long-term dis-ease.

Community. Within the Indigenous context, *community* often refers to one's Indigenous community, as designated by colonizers and recorded on one's status card or the equivalent.

However, in this research, *community* will refer to a healing and wellness community personally created by the individual, which may include both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Contemporary. In this research, *contemporary* describes the context of, and names the current overarching dominant, systemic, Western, Canadian culture and its corresponding paradigms, epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies.

Dis-ease. In alignment with the way in which *disease* is defined in the etymology dictionary (Etymology World, n.d.), the word *dis-ease* is written intentionally to resist the pathologization of dis-ease and reduce it to a simplified and untraceable outcome of a disease with symptoms that are disconnected from oneself and one's historical and current life experiences and environment. The word is reduced into its roots, *dis* and *ease*. This research understands *dis-ease* as an unease or imbalance, not the commonly accepted Western pathologized understanding of disease. Dis-ease is written with a hyphen to demonstrate this research's understanding of the word *dis-ease* as a dis-ease that takes into account one's holistic and relational life, inclusive of historical and current life experiences and the sociocultural context, which all influence one's ease or dis-ease.

In a Good Way. The data featured the mottos *live in a good way* or *do something in a good way*. In this research, when these phrases are used, it refers to the embedded values that ground Indigenous individuals in their lives for wellness; it refers to the values that guide their lives. To live in a good way means to live guided by the commonly known seven Indigenous values/laws; humility, courage, respect, love, honesty/truth, learning/teaching and living it, Wisdom lived, to do no harm, and to act with compassion and kindness.

Quoted Terms. When there are quotation marks used around a word without a reference, this is indicative of the intentional use of a normalized and accepted word that the author rejects and challenges because of the inherent harm and perpetuation of Western concepts that serve colonization and harm Indigenous people. For example, the term "settlers" intuits that colonizing, in fact, "settled" the land when what it did, in reality, was disrupt, harm, and exploit the land and the Indigenous people.

Relations. While there are many research paradigms that are holistic and include social and cultural relationality, what makes the Indigenous perspective unique is the ontological perspective of relationality. The concepts of *relations*, *spirit*, and *environmental relations* are included and are considered to be as important as human relations. When the term *relations* is referenced, it can be understood to be *in relation to* the individual's inner spirit, intuition, heart, mind, and body; the individual's family (blood and non-blood); their community or nation; the individual's relation to the natural environment, trees, animals, water, fire, or skies; and the individual's spiritual relations, past, present, and future.

"Settler" or "Settle." This research resists and challenges the word "settler." The truth was and remains that colonization and colonizers did anything but "settle"; rather, colonization disrupted, disturbed, and harmed North America and all the Indigenous inhabitants.

So-called. The use of the term *so-called* is resistance to and disagreement with a specific commonly accepted term that is actively rejected by the author. For example, the phrase s*o-called "reconciliation"* demonstrates the author's rejection of reconciliation and the widespread societal acceptance of the representation and meaning of the word.

Wellness Values. *Wellness values* are the principles and beliefs that guide one's life. While a value may be consistent across contexts, how the value is expressed may be unique for different individuals and in different contexts. The value inspires the individual's behaviour and roots their life in meaning, as the participant consciously creates their life and behaviour, rooted in achieving and aligning with the values.

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Prologue

Weykt, Shawna Biron Ren Skwest. I would like to acknowledge all my relations and my home nation, Secwepemcúl'ecw territory, for inspiring and contributing to this work. This research is not just an external project or object "out there", but rather an internal research question and inquiry of my personal experience of reclaiming wellness and my identity. I have a practiced understanding of this research; throughout my life I have been and still am continually trying to create a life-context of well-being. It may sound like this is a virtuous and moral choice to reclaim my Indigeneity and wellness; however, it is not. Rather, this inquiry felt more like a forced discomfort, a critical choice of life or death; this is the motivation for this research and the perspective I bring.

I have some ideas and reflections on how I have gotten to where I am now, which I believe is closer to living in wellness, embracing my Indigeneity, and living by traditional Indigenous values. Through my own inquiry, I have witnessed a shift, reconnection, and alignment in my values, ideology, culture, and identity, and, through living with integrity in those with the cultural Wisdom I have received, I have experienced wellness as an outcome. Mine is one small example; while that is interesting, it is not the purpose of this research, it is the inspiration. I want to know how others are doing this. I want to discover what I can learn and integrate into my life from the Wisdom on well-being of others like me. I offer other Indigenous people inspiring stories of how they can do this, too. This is my life's purpose.

Chapter One: Introduction

Re-search and Ceremony: Context

A ceremony can have many purposes; in research, a ceremony is initiated because re-searching for Wisdom is needed as an impetus for positive change (Wilson, 2008). Researcher Shawn Wilson notes:

> The Space between things in a relationship is Sacred, this is called "mana," that is, sacred space. Anytime we do something to enter into the space between things, we are stepping into sacred space. A lot of the time, we enter into sacred space as an accident. Scientific is about a system, not an accident, behind a process to intentionally create new knowledge, bring it closer. Ceremony is about deliberately going into this sacred space, joining ideas, abstractions, get closer to an idea, build a closer relationship with something, whatever my research topic is, the idea (MEA TV, 2020).

My research is ceremony, and within it are embedded a plethora of smaller rituals and ceremonies to support the intention of coming into closer relationship with Wisdom on Indigenous wellness in the contemporary colonial context. To ensure that I conducted this research ceremony with integrity and to ensure that research as ceremony was demonstrated throughout and woven into the entirety of the project, along with Spirit, I took care of my own Spirit and wellness consciously, intentionally, and daily. As in all engaged ceremonies, I began with preparation and this practice was carried through the project, and not just for this research, but as a way of life. As a researcher, there are a myriad of smaller ceremonies in which I regularly engage to ensure my Spirit and life are balanced in a good way. For example, I engage

in Sweats, meditation, time on the land, time with nature, prayer, smudging, and visits with Elders and Indigenous leaders.

This ceremony of research is being initiated because many Indigenous people—this author included—need personal-, community-, and Nation-healing transformation. Colonization has profoundly disrupted Indigenous people, their wellness, culture, traditions, governance, families, health, lands, and all their relations (Duran, 2006; Fabio, 2008; Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012; Thira, 2013; Trocmé et al., 2004). Furthermore, it has disturbed their ideologies and identities, leaving some feeling disconnected, numb, and disoriented (Reading & Wein, 2009; Thira, 2013). One may feel torn between two dichotomous worlds, with pressure to mold oneself and submit to just one; however, regardless of choice, one still feels like a fraud and imposter, not feeling one fits anywhere, not Native, but not White. Who am I? How can I be well? These are questions I have confronted much of my life, and that many people share, a disoriented experience of themselves and a life resulting in dis-ease (Maté, 2008).

This research is a catalyst to demonstrate Indigenous individuals' resilience and to document the reclamation and revitalization of themselves and their lives in a contemporary colonial context. It aims to illuminate relational connections of emergent and common features of the holistic human experience that contribute to a model of Indigenous wellness. Furthermore, it explores features of wellness in a contemporary setting to uncover common patterns and identify hopeful experiences that enable Indigenous individuals to live in contemporary wellness. Moreover, it asks, how can this research and my relationships with the participants enhance their wellness?

This research draws from complementary intersects of contemporary Western theoretical models of humanity and our shared deep nature for wellness that may link to pre-colonial Indigenous lives, practices, values, and ideology, and provide possible explanations for contemporary Indigenous wellness. Exemplifying the intersects strengthens both as core unifying themes point to a common truth of humanness and further to illuminate the strengths of Indigenous culture. In the Indigenous context, the research provides inspiring narratives for others stepping on the path to pursue wellness. The narratives uncover emerging themes of how Indigenous people are reclaiming their Indigeneity and wellness in contemporary colonial Canada. It provides a narrative of Indigenous people thriving in a contemporary context. While there is a plethora of phenomenal research focused on decolonization, there is limited research that features personal decolonization in contemporary life to achieve wellness and Indigeneity.

The research presents narratives that transcend the dichotomy of what it means for an Indigenous person to be either "cultural" and "traditional," or viewed as "assimilated," culturally void, and deficient as an Indigenous person. The intention is to demonstrate how one can lead a contemporary life inextricable from Western society while simultaneously resisting and embracing it and reclaiming their Indigeneity to thrive as Indigenous people once did, prior to colonization. This research is future-focused; not to negate colonization and go back to pre-colonial life, but rather, to consider how to move forward and thrive in a colonial context as an Indigenous person.

Research Purpose

How is contemporary Indigenous wellness conceptualized within the current socio-cultural context? How is contemporary Indigenous wellness achieved by Indigenous individuals

exemplifying wellness? How can I, through this research, support the wellness of the individuals participating in it and recognize that every relationship is an intervention, as I strive to attend to the quality of each relationship?

This research conceptualized and iteratively co-created an understanding of contemporary Indigenous wellness within the current socio-cultural context, from the perspective of wise Indigenous people; second, it honoured and shared successful examples of wellness achieved in contemporary life; and third, it supported the wellness of the individuals participating. This research contributes new knowledge of contemporary Indigenous wellness and how it is being lived by Indigenous individuals. This research illuminates the narratives of Indigenous people who have reclaimed their Indigeneity and who now thrive in wellness in a contemporary context. The term *contemporary*, in this research context, names the current overarching dominant, systemic, Western, Canadian culture and its corresponding paradigms, epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies.

Many Indigenous people have recovered and recreated ways to live in wellness. This research is not interested in ascertaining that there is a specific or only way to live in wellness, but, rather, is interested in all the ways that people are creating and living in wellness, illuminating not only themes of how people are living in wellness as they emerge, but also the distinctive differences in the range of possibilities of paths that are being taken to live in wellness.

This research is interested in creating a praxis—also known as Wisdom—of contemporary Indigenous wellness, which includes the theoretical understanding of Indigenous wellness with lived stories demonstrating how Indigenous wellness is applied. This research

aims to honour and highlight the wellness stories of Indigenous people thriving in contemporary colonial Canada, despite historical and ongoing colonization.

Research Goals and Overview

This research holds the potential to be a catalyst to demonstrate Indigenous individuals' resilience and to document the reclamation and revitalization of themselves and their lives in a contemporary colonial context. The research illuminates relational connections of emergent and common features of the holistic human experience that contribute to a model of Indigenous wellness. It explores features of wellness in a contemporary setting to uncover common patterns and to identify hopeful experiences that enable Indigenous individuals to live in contemporary wellness. My research contributes new knowledge of contemporary Indigenous wellness and, through the narratives of Indigenous people, illustrates how it is being lived by Indigenous individuals who thrive in wellness in a contemporary context.

Social research has long been polarized as either Indigenous or Western in perspectives and methodology. This research shifts away from the traditional academic dichotomy and embraces the strengths of both, an example of contemporary Indigenous research methodology (IRM) that is termed *Two-Eyed Seeing*. According to Marsh et al. (2015),"Two-Eyed Seeing Indigenous decolonizing methodology was utilized to honour the strengths of both Aboriginal and Western knowledge, research techniques, knowledge translation, and program development" (p. 1). This study blends IRM's strengths, as outlined by Wilson (2008) and Kovach (2010a), with an exploratory narrative methodology that compliments, aligns, and adds strength and rigour to the research. While IRM is not the only paradigm to embrace relationality (Given, 2008; Wilson, 2001), IRM is unique in that the whole paradigm has a foundational Spirit

connection to all one's relations and the systematic process of the research a ceremony (Wilson, 2008).

The research discourse here embraces first-person, personal pronouns to support relationality with the readers and the research. The first-person approach allows the researcher to provide contextual narrative and self-location within the research context; it demonstrates where the researcher is in relation to the research and comes into relation with the readers (McGuire-Adams, 2020). Starting relevant sections with contextual self-location helps ensure personal transparency, accountability, integrity, and builds relationality, essential to IRM and social constructionist perspectives (McGuire-Adams, 2020; Wilson, 2008). Third-person writing styles are seen within the research and the Western scientific components of the paper. Embracing both voices exemplifies a true reflection of the researcher's integration of the two worlds. This research approach maintains the researcher's integrity as it is an externalized version in a research context of the researcher's personal internalized experience of coming to know Wisdom as an Indigenous person in a Western colonial context.

Wilson (2001) describes his conceptualization of a paradigm that guides the paradigmatic framework for this research:

> To me, a paradigm is simply a label for a set of beliefs that go together that guide my actions. So, a research paradigm is a set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that go together to guide your actions as to how you're going to go about doing your research. When I was thinking about this, I focused on four aspects that combine in the makeup of different paradigms (p. 175). The methodological approach reflects paradigmatic, ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives.

Context for the Reader

To set the context for this story, substance dependence is what is called "addiction" in the Western medical pathological perspective. From an Indigenous post-colonial perspective, trauma is understood as a natural response and adaptive coping strategy to maintain survival in light of one's experience of their sociocultural conditioning and multiple, compounded traumas throughout their life, inclusive of colonial, intergenerational, and historical traumas (Adams & Clarmont, 2016; Maté, 2008; Thira, 2013).

There are two themes that are imperative to understand and bring into this research context. Some time ago, I was working on an Indigenous research project to gain Wisdom on the contributors that led to the success of individuals who were able to overcome substance dependence. I was inquiring of those individuals as to what led up to and, ultimately, resulted in them reclaiming their lives, free from harmful substances. These people all share some common factors. They had overcome substance dependence, they were Indigenous and had experienced a myriad of traumas, they were socialized into addictions, abuse, racism, discrimination, oppression, marginalization, and trauma, and their social context was that which had conditioned them into possessing a shameful and defective concept of self. However, in spite of the sociocultural environment and life context, they all shared another thing in common; reference to an intrinsic, independently motivated spark, Spirit, or soul that was the impetus for them to reclaim their essence and stop their substance use.

The first feature that this research honours is the independent constructivist perspective and self-determination within each individual. The second imperative theme in this story honours the sociocultural relations of individuals that also contribute to one's reality. During the research

process, it was clear that meaning and the individuals' narratives evolved through dialogue and in relation to me, as the researcher. As we engaged in dialogue about their story, they came to new Wisdom and deeper understanding, and even gained a new understanding of themselves. There is the opportunity for the conceptions of themselves to shift from being morally deficient or weak and lacking control of substances, to compassion for themselves, seeing substances as a survival mechanism. This story also honours the importance of social constructionism to the research perspective, the lens through which the research is understood. In this story, the assumption overlaying the research highlights how the sociocultural context in which individuals were socialized, and their shared experience of trauma shaped their conditioning, behaviour, and identity and resulted in substance dependence for coping and survival.

Lastly, the story honours Indigenous relationality. While the individuals in this story spoke to the intrinsic independent source of self or Spirit that inspired their awakening to heal and stop using substances, some individuals noted that their Spirit animal, their Ancestors, or the Creator prompted their soul to awaken. With all participants, their internal self, soul, Spirit, was called to heal and awake, but only in relation to all their relations.

This overview of the ontological position that shaped this research is mirrored in my personal life. The story outlines the three strands of the relationship that together contribute to one's reality cognitive constructivism, social constructionism, and Indigenous relationality. The experience I shared is an impetus for my research paradigm and the initial perspective for this research.

Within the relational context of this Indigenous research, it is important to name the multiple relations involved. Each participant comes with personal experiences, strengths,

Wisdom, and traumas that stem from their personal life—both historical and current—as well as their sociocultural and colonial context, as they shared their stories and teachings with me. At the same time, I come to the relationship and conversation with my own personal experiences, strengths, Wisdom, and traumas, which arise from my personal life—historical and current—and my sociocultural and colonial context. Together, we co-create a postcolonial healing conversation in the ceremony of this research.

This overview of the context that shaped this research is mirrored in my personal life. The story outlines the three strands of the relationship that together contribute to one's reality; cognitive constructivism, social constructionism, and Indigenous relationality. The experience I share is an impetus for my research paradigm and the initial perspective for this research.

Positionality Disclosure

We know more than we can tell.

Michael Polanyi

My educational and professional background is in mental wellness and psychology, and it is that lens that colours how I view and relate to the world. After earning my Master's degree in counselling psychology, I worked with colleagues who inspired me with the post-colonial and trauma lenses that they brought to mental health, a vastly different perspective from what I had learned in school. At this time, I was also introduced to Indigenous cultural teachings through my work with the First Nations Health Authority and with Indigenous communities. There was a synergy emerging; the teachings from Western experts meshed with what, at the time, seemed unorthodox from the perspective of trauma, post-colonial mental health, and positive psychology, and wellness—all aligned with cultural Wisdom. I was incredibly energized and

excited by the common truths I was learning and the alignment that I was seeing from seemingly separate witnesses; the Western experts were offering a similar, core unifying message to that found in Indigenous cultural teachings.

There was, and still is, a feeling of truth, a viscerally felt sense of peace and compassion when I learn about trauma and the embodied wounds of historical and ongoing colonization. The various seeds of Wisdom, Western and Indigenous, that have been planted and that I have strived to cultivate, have gifted me with the capacity to bring compassion and courage to myself while I inquire about my personal, family, and community suffering; this Wisdom has also gifted me with immense hope that trauma can be healed and that we, as Indigenous people, can thrive, even within a continuous colonial context.

It is through my lived experience of reclaiming myself, and my wellness, and witnessing the ripple effect on my relations' wellness, that I share the theoretical context and perspectives that have been gifted to me by so many knowledge holders. I have been taught to honour the Indigenous Wisdom and the Indigenous part of me, as well as the Western knowledge and colonized part of me. I have forged a path where I embrace and integrate both perspectives with appreciation and love, and I intend to honour the gifts of both the Western scientific enterprise and Indigenous Wisdom, especially where there is a goal of alignment and shared intentions.

While I am not certain how this research will impact change in the world, I have an intuitive feeling it is important. I have never wanted to be a writer, do a Ph.D., nor publish anything. I never felt the need to have my voice heard. But, lately, as I have done my own trauma healing, I have a strong urge about this work that feels like it is erupting within me and an understanding that I am being pushed to share.

In alignment with IRM, this research is a living embodiment of my life (Wilson, 2001). When I began to reclaim my Indigeneity and live by Indigenous cultural values, my life transformed. I became a healthier, happier, more peaceful and gentle human to everyone. It inspired me to change my entire life, my living situation, relationships, activities, daily life routine, and rituals. Re-searching Indigenous ways of living and the values that guided my Ancestors' lives woke me up. I woke up to different ways societies, communities, and nations can exist and structure themselves. I sought out Wisdom on various ideologies and religions and questioned the Western structures and systems I never knew existed; I operated like a prisoner, unaware and unconscious of how Western colonial society shaped my life and myself. As I began to bring into conscious awareness the lens of colonialism that overshadowed my entire life, I could see, respond, and be released from prison.

It is essential that I continually and actively reclaim myself, as I exist in a Western colonial context. I consciously deconstructed myself through a colonial lens and then reconstructed myself. I deliberately live guided by traditional Indigenous values. This means that I actively choose to embrace Western culture aspects I cannot remove or that serve me and I weave contemporary and traditional activities into my daily life that support me in living, guided by Indigenous values with integrity. To keep the colonial lens visible, I intentionally practice daily rituals and regular ceremonies to maintain my foundation of who I am, without slipping back and losing myself again.

By continually reconstructing myself and my Indigeneity, I gained a new perspective and way of relating and existing in the world. I transitioned from an individual to a relational orientation and became concerned with my other relations, not just human. I strive for a life

where I live in daily balance with myself and with the earth. I aim to walk gently, live humbly, and simply. My life is unorthodox, from a Western perspective. However, I live in a more sustainable way that promotes wellness for myself and my home, the planet. I have never been happier, nor more self-determined, empowered, and healthy. This has had a ripple effect on all that I am in relation to.

Overview of the Dissertation

My experience of my Indigenous reclamation has me curious. Does reclaiming Indigeneity have the unintended outcomes of living in wellness, reclaiming identity, and shifting one's ideology, which leads to one living a more sustainable life? It seems that, from my experience and that of others I know who are like me, reclaiming Indigeneity leads one to be more grounded, thoughtful, gracious, kind, and compassionate toward oneself and all one's relations. This research will help to answer if my experiences and those of others I know, and who are like me, are haphazard or if there is a new theme emerging which has the possibility for immense positive social change.

As I uncover *aha* moments and findings and manoeuvre through this over-five-year project, the reader first goes alongside me through the evolution of myself and the project. Next, I provide an overview of my perspective that overlays this project. Following that, in Chapter Two, I offer background literature that provides context for the current state of academic knowledge surrounding the topic. The third chapter transitions into the methodology and methods surrounding the dissertation and my research. The results are unveiled in two chapters, Chapter Four and Chapter Five, which are reflective of the two data sets—Chapter Four illustrates the data of the wellness experts and Chapter Five exhibits the data of wellness role

models. These two chapters offer in-depth quotations to serve as inspiration and narratives that have not yet been documented in the academy. The narratives of wellness of the participants within their contemporary settings are positive and persuasive, intended to inspire and potentially be an impetus for others to reclaim wellness.

The sixth chapter of the dissertation moves into the discussion, which first offers my personal integration and understanding of the model and then braids together supporting literature and the voices of the participants, adding context that provides answers to essential *so what?* queries and details pragmatic examples for inspiration on how wellness is reclaimed and lived. Each phase of the discussion offers opportunities for practical implications. In Chapter Seven, the dissertation closes by sharing further potential implications and concluding remarks.

Contexts Informing the Project

Various contexts, deliberately chosen, underpin the research for this dissertation. In order to demonstrate the parallels between contemporary scientific principles of psychology and Indigenous perspectives, in the initial subsection, I draw upon positive psychology. A description of colonial trauma, set in the context of British Columbia, emphasizes the notion that trauma must be recognized as a central component of discussions regarding wellness, identity, culture, and ideology. Similarly, the subsection on healing from colonial trauma indicates that there are many ways to approach trauma healing and to establish a reconnection to oneself and one's relations.

The final sections of this first chapter go on to address cultural continuity, natural evolution and adaptation, and stress intergenerational connectedness and the community's ability to pass on traditions, guided by the knowledge that culture is learned, adaptive, and is naturally

evolving. I also consider the Indigenous cultural continuum and employ colonial impacts to signify major evolutionary changes; these are categorized into three timeframes—pre-colonial Canada, followed by a period of pervasive colonial trauma, and ending with contemporary colonial now-Canada. I conclude this chapter by emphasizing that this narrative celebrates the fact that the Indigenous individuals included in the research sample have demonstrated significant post-traumatic growth.

Positive Psychology Context

The research draws from psychology to provide the contemporary scientific understanding of the essential ingredients for wellness that align with the Indigenous perspective. Martin Seligman (2002) developed the concept of positive psychology, a strength-based approach to looking at wellbeing. Instead of focusing on what is wrong or on pathologies, this psychology extends beyond individual and isolated symptoms and looks at the person holistically and their interrelationships with others and self. According to Seligman (2002), "Psychology is not just the study of disease, weakness, and damage; it also is the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is wrong; it also is building what is right" (p. 4). Positive psychology shifts the focus to what is going right or well. Positive psychology is the foundational theoretical model shaping this research question and is the theoretical lens for the entire project, inclusive of the lens through which topics are written and the manner in which questions are constructed.

The overarching context in which this research is visioned and the constructs throughout align with a strength-based perspective, working well alongside, and building on, the foundation of strengths. This research inquires into wellness and wellbeing and explores positive

psychology constructs regarding how individuals are reclaiming and revitalizing their lives, and thriving in wellness in contemporary life.

Colonial Trauma Context

British Columbia Mental Health & Substance Use Services (BCMHSUS) (2013) released a trauma-informed practice guide that was co-developed in collaboration with mental health professionals, British Columbia First Nations, and other stakeholders who advocate for the need to support individuals within the broader context of trauma perspective. Trauma-informed approaches are necessary when one is working in an Indigenous setting, given the multitudes of trauma experienced by Indigenous people through colonization (BCMHSUS, 2013).

Trauma Informed Practice Guide. The first step to the trauma-informed approach is trauma awareness (BCMHSUS, 2013). Given this knowledge, the context of this research and colonization can be framed within the context of trauma. This research embraces the definition of trauma that is holistic and understands that colonial trauma is at the root of Indigenous suffering in contemporary Canada, historically, intergenerationally, and presently. This research embraces an ecosystemic trauma perspective which includes the systemic and sociopolitical context of the individual (Goodman, 2015).

Trauma, as articulated by psychologist Gabor Maté (2011), is a fundamental disconnection from the mind, body, and one's authentic self, and has a ripple effect that disconnects the individual from all of their relations, leaving one with a sense of separateness (Maté, 2015; Maté, 2011). Native American psychologist Eduardo Duran (1995) explains the aligning philosophy of trauma from an Indigenous perspective, which is roughly translated as,

"where the blood stops flowing." This description of trauma brings to mind a clear disconnection; as the blood stops, there is a disconnect, which is trauma.

Within the context of this research, I put forward the notion that trauma must be explicitly acknowledged when wellness, identity, culture, and ideology are investigated as an outcome of the pervasive overlay of trauma and disconnection in Indigenous people's lives. First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) offers an Indigenous perspective of wellness, encompassing the individual, mental, spiritual, emotional, physical, relational, and environmental components of wellness, all of which have suffered trauma, resulting in disconnecting from those components of wellness (Urrieta, 2019). I understand this to be *holistic wellness trauma*. At the ideological level, colonization disrupted and disconnected Indigenous people from their ideologies (Thira, 2013). I believe this to be *ideological trauma*. At the identity level, Indigenous individuals have had their identities stripped and replaced with damaging internalized colonial identities (Urrieta, 2019). I consider this to be *identity trauma*. At the cultural level, Indigenous individuals have had their culture and values stolen, and are disconnected, which is *cultural trauma* (Stamm et al., 2004).

Colonial Trauma Healing. Within a colonial trauma perspective, there are many paths into trauma healing and reconnection to oneself and one's relations. Trauma is compounded intergenerationally, socio-culturally passed down from one generation to the next, and epigenetically, through gene expression, and is re-enforced in individuals' current social experience (Bird, 2013; Brave Heart et al., 2011; Urrieta, 2019). Generational trauma has its roots in research of Holocaust survivors, who also experienced genocide. Kellermann (2013) explains:

> The Holocaust left its visible and invisible marks not only on the survivors, but also on their children. Instead of numbers tattooed on their forearms, however, they are marked epigenetically with a chemical coating upon their chromosomes, which represent a kind of biological memory of what the parents experienced. As a result, many suffer from a general vulnerability to stress … New research, however, indicates that they may have been also (epi)genetically transmitted to their children. Integrating both hereditary and environmental factors, epigenetics adds a new and more comprehensive psychobiological dimension to the explanation of transgenerational transmission of trauma (p. 1).

Trauma persists until the cycle is halted through healing work, which, at its source, aims at recovering one's inherent connection to oneself and relations again, which stops the cycle of epigenetic and intergenerational inheritance (Brach, 2012; Duran, 1995; Maté, 2011). Michael Yellow Bird (2013) published work on neuro-decolonization, which articulates that reclaiming the Indigenous practices or contemporary practices which promote a present orientation to life and oneself, results in a change in gene expression and heals intergenerational and present trauma, re-wiring the neuro-schematic networks and re-balancing the adrenal system. When individuals sit in deep reflection, process, and integrate their experience in a meaningful way, this is reconnecting to oneself, one's narrative, and is re-orientating to one's relations; this is healing trauma (Bird, 2013; Brach, 2012). Bird (2013) describes the process of neuro-decolonization:

> The first part of the term, neuro—in neuro-decolonization—refers to neurons which are specialized cells in the nervous system—brain and spinal cord—that send and receive electric signals throughout the body. Decolonization refers to activities that weaken the

> effects of colonialism, facilitate resistance, and create opportunities to promote traditional practices in 10 present-day settings. Neuro-decolonization involves combining mindfulness meditation with traditional and contemporary secular and sacred contemplative practices to replace negative patterns of thought, emotion, and behaviour with healthy, productive ones. Drawing on recent neuroscientific research, neuro-decolonization builds on the idea that healthy, constructive thoughts, emotions, and behaviours can change our brains (and our lives) for the better. Many Indigenous contemplative practices incorporate the same principles and processes as mindfulness, and are important components of physical, emotional, behavioural, and spiritual well-being and healing. Neuro-decolonization seeks an understanding of how mind and brain function are shaped by the stresses of colonialism and compromise the well-being of Indigenous Peoples. Some stressors include, but are certainly not limited to, racism and hate crimes; loss of territories, culture, and pride; high levels of mortality, poverty, and poor health; and disregard of Indigenous Peoples' sovereignty and rights (p. 9).

Reclaiming and revitalizing Indigenous epistemologies and paradigms is decolonizing (Wilson, 2008). At its core, decolonizing is re-connecting one's Indigeneity to oneself, which is identity and cultural trauma healing (Bird, 2013; Duran, 1995). Indigenous research is ceremony, and ceremony is intended to re-discover and re-connect to bring knowledge into a closer relationship with the researcher and those in relation to the research, and is meant to be lived as Wisdom (Wilson, 2008). Decolonization, ceremony, and trauma healing are intended to be used to reconnect to oneself and one's relations. In this vein, decolonization, Indigenous research, and ceremony all offer trauma healing. This research provides the opportunity for individuals to

bring Wisdom on how to live in wellness in today's complex, colonial society. It delivers narrative and inspiration in reclaiming Indigeneity with a plethora of expressions, creating the opportunity for self-reflection and integration and providing social permission to embrace and self-determine the image of their choosing, thereby allowing the person to construct their identity outside the colonial stereotypes by rediscovering, reconnecting, and reclaiming wellness.

Colonization is considered to be synonymous with Indigenous individual, family, community, and Nation-centered complex trauma (Bird, 2013; O'Neill et al., 2018). With that understanding, I put forward the notion that all decolonization and postcolonial work must be framed within the context of trauma and should offer the opportunity for healing.

In the late 1800s, the French psychologist, Pierre Janet, published a framework of the process individuals transition through to overcome trauma, and named it *dissociation theory*. Judith Lewis Herman (2015) draws from the original work in her book, *Trauma and recovery*, creating a contemporary articulation of the three phases, 1) safety and stabilization, 2) remembrance and mourning, and 3) reconnection and integration. The dissociation theory process creates room for the core underpinnings of colonial trauma healing that has room for decolonization and recovering oneself and all one's relations. According to Avalos (2021):

> Historical trauma is a relational wound. It results from the unjust use of power, such as acts of genocide, but also from the ontological ruptures of epistemic and social dispossession. Thankfully, healing historical trauma is also relational, involving the restoration of healthy relationships to self and others, human and other-than-human (p. 96).

Trauma is becoming more widely understood as a fundamental disconnection from self and Spirit as a result of colonial wounds (Duran, 2019; Maté, 2008; Thira, 2013). Trauma recovering means to re-cover, and reclaim what was stolen by colonization (Bird, 2013; Thira, 2013). There is an inherent assumption within the phrase *trauma recovery* that one is re-covering; therefore, if it is re-covered, it must have been disconnected or lost, meaning that what is being recovered is inherently within the person (Brach, 2012; Duran, 2019; Maté, 2008). The holistic understanding of trauma is shared within the narrative inquiry methodology in a manner that is underpinned by the social constructionist and cognitive constructivist paradigms of this research perspective. The process of this project is in relation to me and co-creates an experience for individuals to recover a lost aspect of self. The cognitive constructivist paradigm makes room for the opportunity for the inherent interpersonal recovery of what may need reconnection within oneself and Spirit.

The first phase of trauma healing is *safety and stabilization* (Herman, 2015). In this phase, the priority is for individuals to regain some sense of safety and stability. Colonization includes the events that induced trauma at a myriad of levels (Bird, 2013; Thira, 2013), and so, in this phase, the behaviours or actions must have stopped or lessened enough for individuals to become grounded and to reconnect to their bodies and selves. If this stage does not occur, individuals need to find other ways to cope with the overwhelming emotional and psychological wounds (Scalabrini et al., 2020). In this state, individuals will maintain disconnection from themselves through self-medication with drugs, alcohol, or other compulsive behaviours or will employ other maladaptive coping mechanisms that are often diagnosed as pathologies (Duran, 2019; Maté, 2011; van der Kolk, 2015).

While it is evident that many Indigenous people in Canada have not yet been able to experience this initial phase—characterized by disproportionally lower health, wellness, and social-economic indicators—as a result of the plethora of contributing factors, including ongoing colonization, community and family wounds, lack of support, safety, and space to reconnect to oneself, still, some individuals have managed to do so (Gone et al., 2019; King et al., 2009). Within this research project, cases include people who have moved beyond this first phase.

The second phase is called *remembrance and mourning* (Herman, 2015). In this phase, individuals begin to create a narrative to describe their experiences and begin to process, integrate, and make meaning of their experience and its relevance in their lives now (Herman, 2015; Janet, 1907). This research project includes a blend of individuals within phases two and three (described below). Individuals who have reclaimed wellness and their Indigeneity will have a sense of safety and stabilization, will likely have processed many aspects of colonial trauma, and are in the process of reclaiming those aspects and reconnecting to themselves and all their relations as a source of wellness and Indigenous identity. However, because colonial trauma is not one, isolated event, and is ongoing in a colonial context, there are reoccurring and compounding impacts on people's lives; therefore, while an individual will have processed and healed trauma in some aspects, they may carry some wounds that require them to move beyond that will appropriately situate them within this phase. Kirmayer et al. (2014) offer insight into this idea of recognizing the ongoing colonial context that perpetuates trauma:

> Recent years have seen the rise of historical trauma as a trope to describe the long-term impact of colonization, cultural suppression, and historical oppression of many Indigenous peoples including Native Americans in the United States and Aboriginal

> peoples (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) in Canada … Increasing recognition of this history has influenced the collective identity of Indigenous peoples as well as individuals' modes of self-fashioning. Historical trauma offers an explanation for continuing inequities in health and wellbeing and a focus for social, cultural, and psychological interventions. Politically, it has led to explicit recognition of past violence and, in Canada, to a formal apology from the government, processes of compensation, as well as a Truth and Reconciliation Commission … In seeking to understand the transgenerational effects of historical trauma and processes of recovery, some Indigenous scholars and mental health practitioners have made explicit analogies to the Holocaust and its health impacts on the Jewish people … However, the social, cultural, and psychological contexts of the Holocaust and of post-colonial Indigenous 'survivance' differ in many striking ways. Indeed, the comparison suggests that the persistent suffering of Native peoples in North America reflects not so much past trauma as ongoing structural violence (p. 299).

As possible trauma themes emerge, this research offers an opportunity for individuals to process and heal from them, with these values and principles guiding compassionate narrative interviews (Ellis, 2015).

The third and final phase is called *reconnection and integration* (Herman, 2015). In this phase, individuals have integrated their trauma experience into their lives and have a foundational sense of holistic self and a positive outlook to the future (Herman, 2015; Janet, 1907). Herman (2015) notes that "This stage involves survivors reclaiming their lives by building a new self, forming new relationships, and finding a sustaining faith" (p. 24). In this

phase, individuals move from being a victim of their trauma to recovering themselves and their empowerment to self-determine and redefine their lives and relationships; they honour the trauma, but not in a way that defines them as a survivor but, rather, as experiences experienced within their lives, recognizing that their integrated, holistic identity is more than the sum of their experiences (Herman, 2015; Janet, 1907). Within this research project, the individual cases were found within this stage of trauma recovery. They have a strong sense of awareness of their colonial trauma and spoke openly about it on other platforms prior to sharing within this research project. In addition, they have re-established safety and security, remembered it, and mourned the trauma and losses as a result, and are now living as wellness role models in a colonial context, with a strong sense of self-determined Indigeneity. Their stories of recovering from trauma and thriving beyond phase three can offer inspiration to those in the first and second phases of trauma healing.

Cultural Continuity, Natural Evolution, and Adaptation

Creanza et al. (2017) explain cultural evolution theory which describes culture as a naturally adapting social phenomenon that is influenced by the environmental context, individuals, and the relationships within the environment at that point in time. Culture is a product of external influences and internal, individual expression. Culture and genetic adaptation are woven together as a braid, environment influences gene expression and vice versa. Culture, from the perspective of Creanza et al. (2017), is shaped by:

> human cultural traits—behaviours, ideas, and technologies that can be learned from other individuals—can exhibit complex patterns of transmission and evolution … Furthermore, cultural and genetic evolution can interact with one another and influence both

> transmission and selection. This interaction requires theoretical treatments of gene-culture coevolution and dual inheritance, in addition to purely cultural evolution (p. 7782).

Cultural evolution dates back approximately 280,000 years, as a key driver in cultural adaptation through social learning, also known as cultural learning (Henrich & McElreath, 2007). If uninterrupted, culture naturally adapts to reflect the contemporary environment and is carried from one generation to the next through individual and collective memory; this is called *cultural continuity* (Auger, 2016; LaRocque, 2011). From an Indigenous perspective, cultural continuity is "intergenerational cultural connectedness, which is maintained through intact families and the engagement of elders, who pass traditions to subsequent generations" (Reading & Wien, 2009, p. 18), with the understanding that culture is learned, it is adaptive, and it naturally evolves. Given the environmental and social context, it is important to inquire into Indigenous culture through the colonial continuum in Canada to build context to the current cultural and Indigenous circumstances in colonial Canada.

Indigenous Cultural Continuum in Now-Canada

This research was motivated by my recognition that colonization interrupted the natural flow of cultural continuity. Within Canada, Indigenous culture has been heavily and involuntarily subjected to forced external colonial action with the intention to, first, enact genocide on Indigenous people in Canada and then, to deliberately force cultural assimilation—in the form of Western colonial standards to suit colonial settlers' culture—upon those who did not perish in the initial genocide (De Leeuw et al., 2010). Colonization is recognized as cultural trauma that disrupted cultural progress and disconnected Indigenous people from their culture

(Urrieta, 2019). The Indigenous cultural continuum uses major colonial impacts as time-markers to signify the major evolutionary changes, and I have categorized the Indigenous cultural evolution into three broad timeframes; *pre-colonial Canada*, 21000 B.C.-1700; *pervasive colonial trauma*, 1700-1996, when the last residential school closed; and *contemporary colonial Canada*, 1996-current time (which is the focus of this research inquiry).

Prior to colonization—that is, for most of Indigenous history—Indigenous culture was broadly consistent, with minimal change to the broader culture of hunter-gather societies (Junger, 2016). Then, colonization came and abruptly and intentionally disrupted Indigenous peoples' natural, cultural progression, an event which not only halted the cultural process, but attempted to dismantle and discontinue it from Indigenous individuals' lives, through forced assimilation and genocide (Crichlow, 2003). Now, Indigenous people still exist within systemic colonial Canada, with some liberties and some encouragement to reclaim their Indigeneity, culture, and wellness, in a modern, overarching dominant Western culture (De Leeuw et al., 2010).

This research acknowledges the disruption in cultural continuity and embraces a perspective that Indigenous people thrived, pre-colonization; they had all the ingredients in their lives, family, society, and culture that promoted living in wellness (Carrera-Bastos et al., 2011; Gurven & Kaplan, 2007; Junger, 2016). Much research points to the inherent natural strengths and gifts of the tribal, hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Some argue that progress is merely a perspective (Axtell, 1981; Junger, 2016; Ryan, 2019; Wright, 2004). The pervasive narrative of perpetual progress offered by Western society about the inherent progress of modernization assumes the progress of society, attributes it to Western domination, and positions this group as superior and

advanced; a view which, depending on one's perspective and the indicators used to measure progress, is up for debate (Axtell, 1981; Junger, 2016; Ryan, 2019; Wright, 2004).

While pre-colonial life is honoured for its strengths, this research is not to advocate for going back to pre-colonial life; rather, this research draws from science and theory, which offer explanations as to the reasons that pre-colonial Indigenous people thrived. This research looks to uncover common threads of truth from separate witnesses (Western and Indigenous) to strengthen both perspectives. This research aims to illuminate emerging themes regarding the ways in which people who are thriving in a current colonial context reclaimed wellness and Indigeneity after the trauma and wounds of colonial forces, and then, to look to the supportive theory that offers a supplementary explanation. Anthropology and historical accounts of pre-colonial Indigenous life align with the current scientific theoretical models of wellness and resilience. This research inquires within the current context to discover if the same theoretical frameworks that explain why our Indigenous Ancestors thrived still supports and explains why people are finding healing and reclaiming wellness, and, further, are thriving within the contemporary context.

Post-Traumatic Growth

It is evident that Indigenous people in Canada have experienced a myriad of traumas as a result of colonization and that they still experience colonial violence and the disconnection, dis-ease, and compounded trauma of the ongoing impacts (Bird, 2013; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; O'Neill et al., 2018). However, it must be made explicit and celebrated that the individuals within this research are a small sample of Indigenous individuals who have demonstrated post-traumatic growth. Post-traumatic growth is an explicit assumption of each participant in this

research. There is no way that one can be Indigenous in Canada and escape the traumas of historical and ongoing colonization. For example, nearly every Indigenous person in Canada has a grandmother, mother, or another close family member who attended residential school; this one, shared experience, alone, has trauma impacts.

Given the premise that every Indigenous person, at some level, has some unique trauma from our shared experience of being Indigenous in Canada and facing colonization, the fact that these individuals now are thriving in wellness is a demonstration of embodied post-traumatic growth. The role models who demonstrate wellness have engaged in healing and reconnection work that has resulted in positive impacts on their wellbeing, post-trauma, and that maintains their post-traumatic growth, in the face of the colonial Canadian context. The following are how key terms are interpreted in this work.

Post-traumatic growth describes the phenomenon in which individuals who encounter trauma or traumas experience positive impacts on their psychological well-being (Infurna & Jayawickreme, 2019). From an Indigenous perspective, I understand this, more broadly, to include holistic wellbeing. The positive impacts are not only experienced at the individual level but are extended to all one's relations. Furthermore, post-traumatic growth, from my Indigenous perspective, includes the traumas of our Ancestors and takes into account the permeability of the trauma, which steeps into the next generation (Brave Heart et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2014). From the Western perspective, this permeability can be understood to be trauma that passes through historical, transgenerational, and epigenetic transmission (Bird, 2013; Franklin et al., 2010; Kellermann, 2013; Maté, 2011; van der Kolk, 2015).

Indigenous Wisdom describes trauma as *spiritual wounds where the blood stops flowing*, and the wounds are passed down in our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual memory (Duran, 2006). Through historical, transgenerational, and epigenetic traumas, the Indigenous understanding is that we carry those traumas until the cycle is broken and the person living at that time confronts healing work and experiences post-traumatic growth. At this time, the healing then is passed onto the Ancestors who were not able to heal during their time in the physical world and onto those yet to be born (Mitchell & Maracle, 2005). According to Duran (1998):

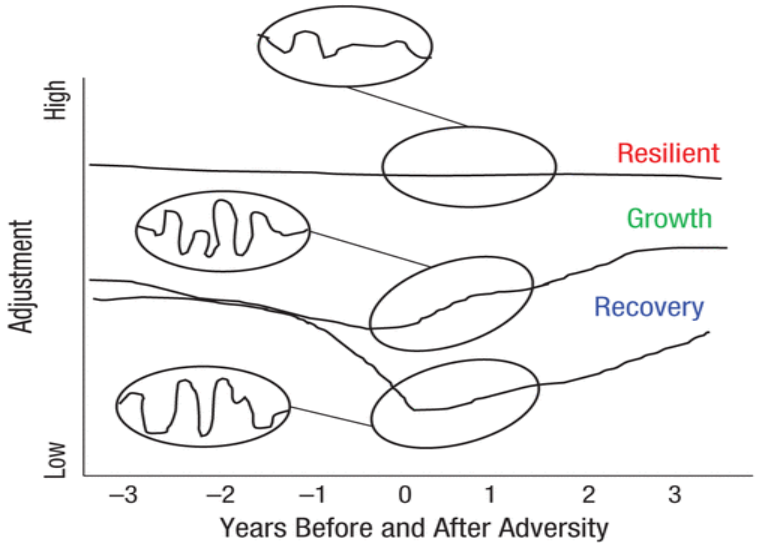
> We have already paid the price. It's time to accept the many blessings that the creator has in store for us. We must honour our people who sacrificed everything through honouring ourselves and healing ourselves. By healing ourselves, we will also heal the wounds of our Ancestors and the unborn generations (n.p.).

From the Indigenous perspective, then, post-traumatic growth provides the opportunity for those living now to heal the traumas for themselves, their Ancestors, and those unborn. Indigenous perspective understands that trauma lives through generations; even though the individual alive now may not have directly experienced the traumas, they carry them until the cycle is broken and, thus, the individual living now attains healing for themselves and all their relations (Duran, 1998; Foor, 2017). Post-traumatic growth, from an Indigenous perspective, includes all one's relations' lives, not just the current individual's life. Post-traumatic growth is essential to acknowledge because it offers a message of hope, optimism, and responsibility. This responsibility implies that any healing, and the positive change arising from healing, also heals our families—those who have since passed and were not able to heal in their lives, and those yet

to be born. Figure 1, below, demonstrates the range of possibilities, resilience, growth, or recovery, for adjustment and adversity after trauma.

Figure 1

Post Traumatic Growth



Note. See Infurna and Jayawickreme (2019). Figure 1 demonstrates the range of possibilities, resilience, growth, or recovery, for adjustment and adversity after trauma. Not included on the graph is data on those who do not recover and who experience ongoing negative impacts from their traumas. In the context of this research, individuals have experienced post-traumatic growth for which they have engaged in healing and reconnection work that has resulted in positive impacts on their wellbeing, post-trauma, and are maintaining post-traumatic growth in the face of the Canadian colonial context.

In Chapter One, I have detailed my positionality. I have, additionally, offered an outline of the dissertation itself, and the various contexts informing this work; predominantly, the Indigenous perspective. The following chapter, Chapter Two, begins with a focus upon the pertinent theoretical models that underpin the dissertation. A detailed overview of the relevant literature in Chapter Two illustrates the existing knowledge of the dissertation's theoretical

models from a wellness perspective and outlines the gaps in that knowledge that are explored in my research.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Roots and Literature Review

This chapter begins by creating context, offering relevant theoretical models that provide the roots or foundations of the project, including self-determination theory, First Nations Health Authority's perspective on Wellness, and the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework, and the use of the contemporary Indigenous Wellness Wheel. This overview incorporates an examination of the existing literature in the context of wellness that serves as a base of current knowledge and highlights the contemporary gap for this research. The literature review encompasses various perspectives such as those of identity, ideology, values, and resilience.

Literature Regarding Relevant Theoretical Frameworks

In this research, theory acts as a framework and makes explicit the theoretical perspectives shaping the research (Walsham, 1995; Walsham & Han, 1993). Theory provides context and explanation until a better theory is discovered or developed. Multiple theories mold research and offer explanations for the research phenomenon (Dobson, 1999). According to Dobson (1999), theory "should be used as a 'scaffold,' to be discarded when no longer needed. This view suggests that there is no such thing as best theory, only different ways of seeing the world" (p. 161). Theory creates the research's inspiration and context, and accounts for previous work along with the complex and diverse sources of knowledge informing the research project (Dobson, 1999). On the subject of theory, Walsham (1995) contends:

> The motivation for the use of theory in the earlier stages of interpretive case studies is to create an initial theoretical framework which takes account of previous knowledge, and which creates a sensible theoretical basis to inform

the topics and approach of the early empirical work (p. 76).

Within this research, theory is used as an act of interpretation, embraced with openness, and is inspected with curious inquiry. It is acknowledged that the theories drawn upon here were created within a Western scientific context. The theories may cut through various contexts, including this Indigenous colonial context, and may demonstrate relevance and supportive explanation for the data; on the other hand, they may not, and the data may demonstrate current theories surrounding wellness as inconsequential within this context.

The review of the body of pertinent literature addresses some of the theoretical perspectives that illuminate the constructs of wellness from a human context. Theory on the topic of identity, for instance, explains the fluid nature of identity, offering hope that Indigeneity can be reclaimed. As the literature indicates, theory focused on values affirms the importance of values in wellness as further determined in this dissertation by individuals, families, communities, and societal action. The literature addressing the importance of ideology stems from the significant impact ideology has faced from colonization. Understanding ideology may allow themes to emerge from the research that support Indigenous ideological orientation and wellness. Cultural resiliency theory roots the research in the context of Indigenous culture as a source of wellness and offers some ideas of how traditional cultural practices are being reclaimed to support wellness in contemporary life.

Theories of Wellness

While there is not one, singular concept of Indigenous wellness, there are abstractions, theoretical models, and definitions that intersect and articulate aligning ideas of the constructs of wellness. I understand contemporary wellness to be the intersection of Western scientific models

of wellness that cut through cultural context to explain wellness, based on shared fundamental human needs for wellness; these models also explain pre-colonial wellness and align with the contemporary definition of Indigenous wellness.

Of relevance here are the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) model of wellness, self-determination theory (SDT), and the contemporary Indigenous Wellness Wheel (CIWW) model, all of which align with ingredients that were present in pre-colonial life and provide one explanation for pre-colonial wellness, which I investigate in upcoming chapter sections. Both Western and Indigenous theories and models permeate contexts, are relevant to pre-colonial life, and could act as the theoretical fabric to explain pre-colonial and contemporary colonial Indigenous wellness (Ryan et al., 2008).

Wellness, in this context, and in each of the corresponding models, is eudaimonic. *Eudaimonia* is a perspective of wellness that values the process and engagement with one's life that supports well-being. The eudaimonic perspective embraces the entirety of the human experience, valuing and appreciating the spectrum of emotion, or so-called "negative and positive emotional states." This perspective, with its acceptance of the entirety of human experience, supports holistic personal and relational growth, development, and a connection that results in wellness (Ryan et al., 2008). Comparatively, the hedonic happiness perspective affirms one's orientation to life and focuses on avoiding pain and discomfort, thereby attaining joy and pleasure (Ryan et al., 2008). Eudaimonic living promotes pro-social behaviour and supports individuals in self and relational connection and serves as a self-fulfilling circle of reciprocity and enhanced wellness (Ryan et al., 2008). According to Deci and Ryan (2008):

> Research on well-being can be thought of as falling into two traditions. In one—the hedonistic tradition—the focus is on happiness, generally defined as the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect. In the other—the eudaimonic tradition—the focus is on living life in a full and deeply satisfying way … A second view considers well-being to consist of more than just happiness, suggesting that people's reports of being happy (or of being positively affective and satisfied) does not necessarily mean that they are psychologically well. This second perspective is referred to as eudaimonia … and is concerned with living well or actualizing one's human potentials. This conceptualization maintains that well-being is not so much an outcome or end state as it is a process of fulfilling or realizing one's daimon or true nature—that is, of fulfilling one's virtuous potentials and living as one was inherently intended to live (p. 2).

Eudaimonic wellness reflects the constructivist epistemology from both cognitive and social traditions echoing three similar frameworks; the FNHA model of wellness, self-determination theory (SDT), and the contemporary Indigenous wellness wheel (CIWW). In all these sources, wellness is both individually and independently determined and externally and socially connected; all acknowledge the importance of the social context which asserts meaning of an individual's experience and individual self-determination that creates independent meaning of their experience in a continuous balance of engagement (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Thira, 2021).

The FNHA perspective on wellness, through its internal, social, and cultural aspects, honours and reflects the shared epistemology of the woven social constructionist and cognitive constructivist approaches (Merriam 1998, Stake, 1995; Wilson, 2008). The model recognizes that both cognitive and constructivist opportunity exists for the individual to create independent

meaning of their experience, but also holds that the subjective experience is inseparable and influenced by past, current, and future relations and context (FNHA, 2017). This interwoven model acknowledges the continuous balance of internal and external relations and the fact that the continuous reciprocal engagement of experience cultivates meaning. Both epistemologies are articulated within the holistic perspective on wellness that includes the individual at the center with the responsibility for personal autonomy, to make self-determined choices and engage in personal reflection and awareness (Ryan & Deci, 2022). The outer layers of this model embrace external and social impacts of culture and relations that all interplay from pre-conception throughout one's life. The model is inseparable from the overarching circle encapsulating the individual within and is inseparable from the socio-cultural and environmental context.

Thira's (2021) ICWW demonstrates the cognitive constructionist and social constructionist epistemologies by honouring the individual's independent creation of meaning of their experience of the gifts of Wisdom, empowerment, purpose, and connection within their social framework. However, these gifts lead to wellness and are meaningful because of the values which are socio-culturally created and made possible within the social constructionist context. The values are gifts that are meaningful only within the context of one's relations.

Likewise, Deci and Ryan's (2008) SDT embodies both the cognitive constructivist and social constructionist epistemologies. The ingredients of competence, autonomy, mindfulness, and relatedness demonstrate the individual and independent meaning making of one's experience through valuing the importance of personal competence, self-awareness, and autonomy, but acknowledge that those constructs exist within the larger socio-cultural context and are inseparable and meaningless without relationality.

Indigenous Wellness

Sasakamoose et al. (2017) offer a context and a consolidated understanding and definitions of Indigenous wellness that have been offered by others. First, it is important to note that I am not asserting any one definition of Indigenous wellness, rather offering a glimpse through this research to observe other Indigenous people and to note, through their narratives, what it looks like to live Indigenous wellness. This allows them to inspire and uphold distinctness within the intersectionality of Indigeneity and Indigenous wellness. I am in complete agreement with their assertion that:

> We acknowledge that Indigenous nations have distinct sacred knowledge, beliefs, and traditions and that each individual community will locally develop this framework to their own ways of knowing. However, unified concepts of culture have been identified (Dumont, 2014) and we use this as a basis for building the theory. As an Indigenous construct, wellness is an inclusive state or position of balance, wherein spirit–heart–mind–body work together through the primary unified concepts of culture, thus rendering culture, in and by itself, as an intervention toward wellness (Fiedeldey-Van Dijk et al., 2016). McConnery and Dumont's (2010) concept of Native wellness is defined as the whole and healthy person expressed through a balance of spirit, heart, mind, and body (as cited in Sasakamoose et al., 2017, p. 7).

The First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum. Mental wellness is supported by culture, language, Elders, families, and creation, and is necessary for healthy individual, community, and family life. First Nations embrace the achievement of whole health—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, and economic well- being—through a coordinated,

comprehensive approach that respects, values, and utilizes First Nations' cultural knowledge, approaches, languages, and ways of knowing (p. 1).

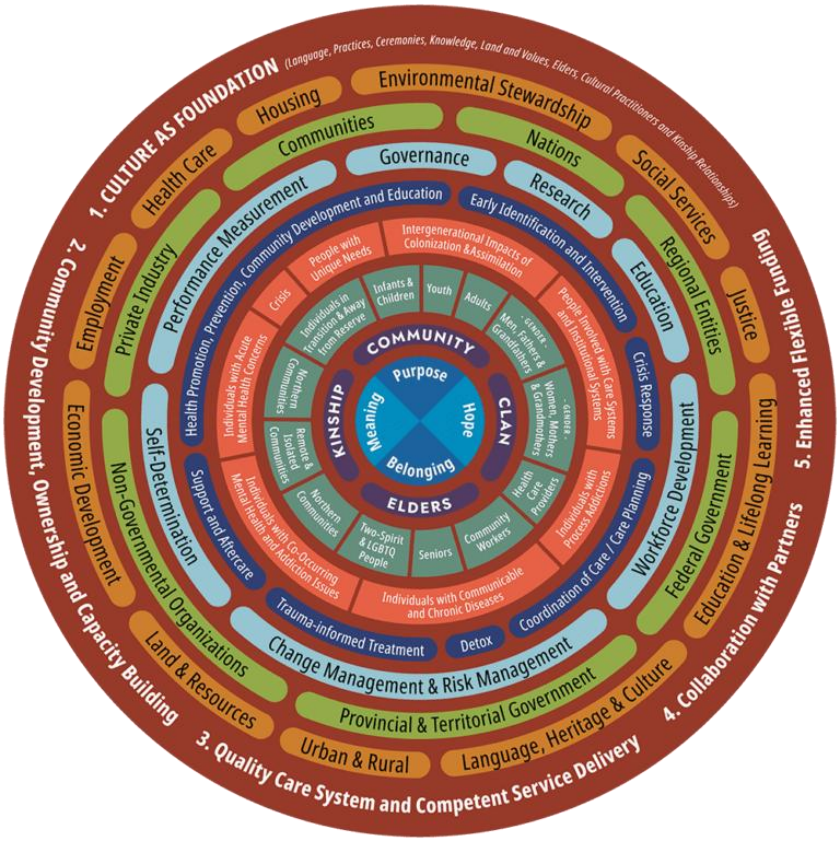
The Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (Health Canada, 2015) offers a culturally rooted holistic model that depicts all the constructs necessary to support mental wellness, and it embraces the contemporary sociocultural environment. It is held in culture and acknowledges the role of myriad contributors to wellness, from the micro to the macro layers, as outlined below, spanning the outer layers inclusive of systemic structures; for example, private enterprise and government. The model moves inwards to illustrate the social determinants of health, health governance, self determination, and on to the individual contributors throughout their lifespan, inclusive of the interconnected physical-mental-emotional-spiritual balance; all in relation to hope, belonging, purpose, and meaning. In the words of the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (2015):

> The First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum (the Continuum) is a complex model, rooted in culture and comprised of several layers and elements foundational to supporting First Nations mental wellness. Embedded within the model are the key themes that emerged through dialogue with partners as well as the social determinants of health that are critical to supporting and maintaining wellness (p. 2).

Below is the foundation's detailed holistic First Nations mental wellness continuum framework, that graphically communicates the interconnected constructs of mental wellness.

Figure 2

First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework



FNHA Contemporary Indigenous Wellness Model. Evidence regarding pre-colonial wellness is found in the example of the First Nations Health Authority. This model is a counter-party understanding of pre-colonial wellness of Indigenous people in British Columbia. Through intensive engagement with First Nations in BC, which included Elders, culture holders, and Indigenous wellness experts who speak for culture, FNHA developed the perspective that wellness spans one's life, even prior to conception; this is named the *life course continuum*. FNHA (2017) notes that "Our opportunity for good health starts long before we need medical

care" (p. 9). FNHA (2017) embraces a wellness vision that encompasses healthy, self-determining and vibrant BC First Nations children, families, and communities and asserts that the Indigenous understanding of wellness is circular, holistic, and has many spheres that overlay and encompass one another.

First Nations Health Authority (2021) developed an Indigenous understanding of wellness through extensive collaboration with many Indigenous people across BC. They describe wellness as a harmonious balancing of the relational aspect that contributes to the individual, as depicted in Figure 3, below. Within the self, the encompassing layers are mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical, along with personal responsibility and autonomy to continually strive for balance in these quadrants. Within the Indigenous paradigm, values are imperative for wellness.

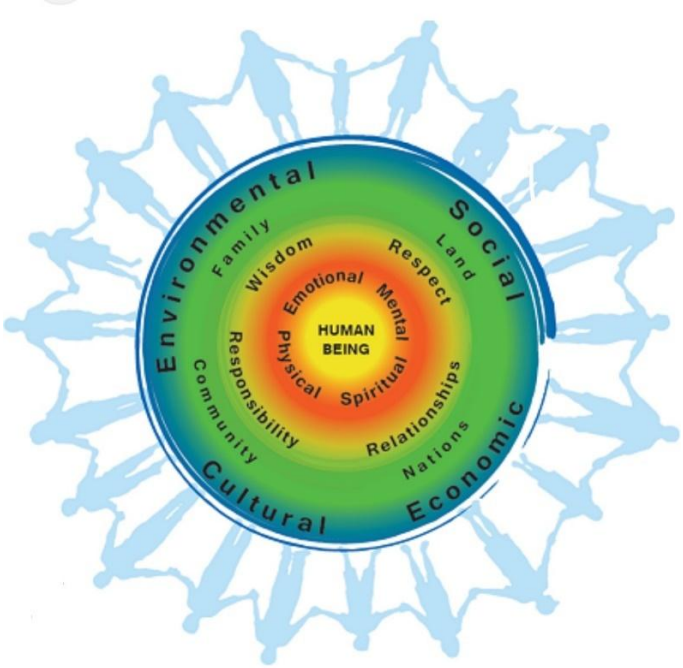
The overarching circle of the individual comprises values that, when lived, will uphold wellness. There are four foundational values—respect, Wisdom, responsibility, and relationships—but many other values also link to these four. Across Canada, there are several foundational values; for example, the Seven Grandfather Teachings, or the Seven Sacred Teachings, which hold seven foundation values within each teaching that supports wellness (Borrows, 2008). Borrows (2008) outlines the Seven Values, noting that "the self is best governed through principles such as *Nbwaakaawin* (Wisdom), *Zaagidwin* (love), *Mnaadendimowin* (respect), *Aakwade'ewin* (bravery), *Dbaadendiziwin* (humility) *Gwekwaadiziwin* (honesty), and *Debwewin* (truth)" (p. 31).

The next supporting circle overlaying these constructs of wellness, from the perspective of FNHA, is one's relations. These relations extend beyond one's relatives to stress the equal importance of one's relation to the land and all that lives on it, and to community and Nation,

and the relations within them. The final overarching circle acknowledges the broader context of the person's lived experience, and the economic, social, environment, and culture in which one exists, all of which are continually influencing an individual and that require harmony for one to experience wellness (FNHA, 2021).

Figure 3

FNHA Perspective on Wellness



Self Determination Theory

Deci and Ryan (2008) lead the work on self-determination theory (SDT), which asserts that wellness is experienced when regular action is taken that supports the basic human needs for competence, autonomy, mindfulness, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2022). Deci and Ryan (2008) base eudaimonia in self-determination theory, supported by four concepts; 1) pursuing intrinsic goals such as relationship, community and personal growth as opposed to extrinsic goals

of wealth and power; 2) behaving in autonomous ways; 3) being mindful and aware; and 4) satisfying core psychological needs for competence and relatedness (p. 139).

A substantial body of research is concerned with relatedness. Individuals engage with relations in a reciprocal manner; they offer a contribution that is meaningful to them and others, also called *prosocial behaviour* (Boehm, 2012; Deci and Ryan, 2008; Lee, 1989; Woodburn, 2005). Relatedness is inclusive of the feelings of care and significance. Individuals who have their relatedness criteria met will have a sense of belonging and generally will have a feeling of meaningful connection to their relations. This explanation aligns with the Indigenous wellness concept that demonstrates the interconnected link and importance of having balanced and positive relations with all one's relations, family, community, and environment and is reflected in the social sphere.

Anthropologist Christopher Boehm (2012) studied 154 foraging societies and found that they were inherently relational and reciprocal, with a deep sense of belonging and regular engagement with prosocial behaviour. Everyone intimately knew one another, and actions supported the survival of the group (Boehm, 2012). Relational concerns were of the utmost importance, and individuals were constantly part of, and in service to, their relational tribe. Action was taken that promoted group wellbeing and survival, so inherently, individuals' actions were meaningful to their relations (Boehm, 2012). It can be surmised that Indigenous pre-colonial life would share a strong resemblance to the foraging societies analyzed in Boehm's (2012) published work. It seems that being needed, which results in strong connections, loyalty, and group belonging, was fundamental to the pre-colonial human experience.

Studies have also investigated competence as an essential ingredient of wellness (Gray, 2014; Ryan, 2019). The theory of SDT explains that, to experience wellness, one must feel competence in their life, and individuals must feel effective and empowered. With competence, individuals have intrinsic motivation and can take steps to foster their strengths and the unique gifts in areas in which they are passionate and which matter within the context of their environment and relations. Competence is the sense that an individual can achieve something of value to them and their relations, with a level of mastery and wholehearted engagement and commitment.

In pre-colonial life, "work" was one of the places to experience competence (Ryan, 2019). Competence requires creativity, self-determination, spontaneity, and wholehearted engagement (Ryan, 2009). Pre-colonial work; that is, the activities required for survival, is aligned with what is understood as competence (Gray, 2009; Ryan, 2009). Play theory has been used to explain pre-colonial work engagement; in egalitarian pre-colonial societies, work was more akin to play and was created on a culture of fairness, cooperation, creativity, non-competition, consent, and spontaneity, creating a context in which competence could thrive (Gray, 2014). Work aligning with the criteria of play cultivated a context where competence flourished. Furthermore, the limited requirement of work also supported further opportunities for competence; anthropologists estimate approximately 15 hours per week was dedicated to working. Thus, while there was competence within work, there was ample time to further promote competence with hobbies and spiritual engagement (Gray, 2009).

The physical environment also promoted competence. The environment required a consistent creative process that embraced ingenuity, spontaneity, intelligence, and mastery as the

natural environment was ever-changing, with many unpredictable and shifting contexts and circumstances that required Wisdom and the ability to adapt and change at a moment's notice. Gray (2014) notes that immense intelligence was needed to work. For example, to hunt successfully, hunters must be extraordinarily skilled and creative, with expert knowledge of engineering for trapping, making tools for foraging, and designing weapons for protection (Liebenberg, 2013). Research on the intelligence of hunter-gatherers acknowledges them as the founders of science. For example, tracking requires the same intellectual abilities as modern physics (Liebenberg, 2013). As Snively et al. (2016) observe, Indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge has been incorporated into contemporary science. Thus, hunter-gathers experienced infinite opportunities for competence, supporting their wellbeing.

Researchers have also given attention to mindfulness and acting with awareness. As Deci and Ryan (2012) suggest, in recent years, mindfulness has been linked with autonomous self-regulation. For pre-colonial individuals, everything was present-oriented, providing them the opportunity to live embodied with self and external awareness, and to respond based on internal and social-cultural experiences. Suzman (2017) notes their present-orientation and mindful connection to their activities and an attuned awareness of the relational environment and selves. Regular daily activities were rooted in mindful awareness, such as foraging, hunting, child-rearing, environmental awareness, and spiritual engagement (Suzman, 2017). Present orientation in one's life has been extensively recorded as having a connection to well-being (Brach, 2012; Brave Heart, 1998, Duran, 2006; Tobin, 2016; Yellow Bird, 2013).

Recent studies reveal that autonomy is a necessary ingredient for wellness. Individuals require self-determination as an impetus for behaviour that is congruent with their values and

identity, which are socially and culturally constructed (Schwartz, 2012; Weber, 1958). In this vein, Ryan and Deci (2022) observe the power of autonomous motivation, which results in improved performance and overall well-being.

Autonomy means that individuals can choose to behave in ways that are in alignment with intrinsic values. Autonomy also means that individuals have the opportunity to make choices, self-determine their lives, and express their lives in an embodied and visceral way that aligns with their values. Individuals who experience autonomy will be whole-heartedly behind the actions they pursue and committed to their pursuit. Pre-colonial societies were highly pro-social, loyal and had a deep sense of group belonging, purpose, and contribution and consistently acted in ways that promoted personal and group wellness (Gray, 2011; Ryan, 2019; Suzman, 2017). According to Gray (2011), in practicing autonomy, communities were found to exhibit a core value of the equality of individuals.

Self-determination is an integral aspect of autonomy and an ingredient that was fundamental to pre-colonial life. Gray (2009), supported by Ryan (2019), observes that work was voluntary, and leisure time was self-determined in terms of the type of work that was undertaken, the length of time one worked, and the option to work. While some might presume that unemployment would therefore be high, the findings were vastly contrary. Unemployment was only seen in those unable to work, Elders, those injured or ill, and children (Gray, 2004). Individuals choose consistently to work and to contribute. Pre-colonial life nurtured autonomy and the ingredients of autonomy, and as a result, individuals, families, tribes, and Nations experienced wellness; furthermore, so did their relations.

Contemporary Indigenous Wellness Wheel

Studies of Indigenous wellness and its relationship to core values highlight the supportive and central nature of those values (Thira, 2021). Psychologist Darien Thira's (2021) work describes the constructs of wellness that have been shared with him through decades of service to Indigenous communities and the Wisdom he has been gifted in return. Thira (2021) explains that, at its core, Indigenous wellness in contemporary Canada can be reclaimed by people living by traditional cultural values in a contemporary context. In spite of colonial acts, Indigenous cultural values are still known and are present in individuals, communities, and Nations. Thira (2021) offers a contemporary Indigenous Wellness Wheel (CIWW) that includes core values and the resulting psychological gifts that accrue when the values are embodied. The value of culture leads to Wisdom; the value of care provides connection; the value of respect provides empowerment; and the value of contribution leads to purpose.

Thira (2021) explains the first quadrant of the wheel as the *value of culture* and the honouring of Spirit, which, when embodied, guide us with the gift of Wisdom. The value of culture emphasizes the importance of having a relationship with one's inner voice and relational connections, and stresses the importance of cultural teachings guiding one's life. When individuals live the values of culture and Spirit, they walk through life with Wisdom. Together with cultural and spiritual Wisdom, this quadrant creates a positive feedback loop that offers a strong moral compass leading to choices that result in wellness for themselves and their relations.

Pre-colonial individuals, families, and societies survived and thrived because their daily lives were guided by their cultural values, rooted in spiritual connection and continuous spiritual

engagement with all their relations to create a way of existing that encompassed intuited and embodied Wisdom (Thira, 2021). Pre-colonial life was steeped in spiritual connection, but this is differentiated from religious belief; rather than spiritual engagement, beliefs, culture, and values were integrated into daily life as a continuous embodied awareness that supported prosocial behaviour with all one's relations and promoted the empowerment, self-worth, health, and well-being of the group (Lee, 1989; Woodburn, 2005). Spiritual engagement differentiated from the common religious perspective contemporary religions embrace, as spiritual engagement was not premised with the concern of morality or human behaviour; that was, instead, the role of the group (Marshall, 1962; Norenzayan et al., 2016; Peoples & Marlowe, 2012; Peoples et al., 2016; Woodburn, 1997).

Thira (2021) advocates for the notion that cultural and spiritual connections are necessary for wellness, elements which inherently have cultural values embedded. Research on cultural evolution may leave one feeling desperate for any cultural fibers left within contemporary Indigenous life, striving to reclaim anything that has survived colonization. However, research provides hope that the cultural values that are embedded in spirituality, religion, or mythology are relatively stable, unlike within other cultural constructs (Berezkin, 2008; Blust, 2013; Peoples et al., 2016). Spiritual conceptions are shown to be relatively continuous across time and space through deep ancestral connection and possible epigenetic links (Berezkin, 2008; Blust, 2013; Peoples et al., 2016). The phenomenon that allows for the continuity of spirituality across experiences, such as Indigenous cultural genocide, explains how spirituality survived colonial violence and can be reclaimed in this colonial context.

The second quadrant of the Indigenous Wellness Wheel holds the *value of care* which, when lived, provides the gift of connection. This quadrant focuses on the need to be connected within oneself and to belong. The desire to support others provides an explanation for our inherent need as humans to care and be cared for and, when we engage with the care, we receive the necessary gift of connection to ourselves and our relations (Boehm, 2012). Together with caring, connection creates a positive feedback loop of compassionate belonging that explains the propensity for prosocial action and provides the sense of being connected (Thomas, E., 2006).

Pre-colonial life was steeped with caring and connected relations (Boehm, 2012). The core thread woven through pre-colonial culture was the equality of individuals, which took immense care and connection to attain. Pre-colonial societies were fiercely egalitarian and strived for continuous equity, which was enforced through reverse dominance, where the group held power, compared to hierarchy dominance, where a few held power over the larger group. The structure within pre-colonial groups was organized and embedded with care and connection (Ingold, 1999). Egalitarian societies emphasized the care and well-being of the entire group over the individual; no one individual was able to accumulate wealth nor be wealthier than any other. This meant that wealth distribution and redistribution occurred regularly, and those within the tribe, such as Elders, were as cared for as any other individual, resulting in a community that experienced a deep relational connection to one another. It has been consistently documented that the compassionate, caring parenting approaches of pre-colonial tribes resulted in connected children, parents, families, and communities who promote prosocial actions and wellness of the community (Boehm, 2012; Suzman, 2017; Thomas, E., 2006).

Thira (2021) describes the third quadrant of the Wellness Wheel as incorporating the *value of respect* which, when lived, leads to the gift of empowerment. Respect focuses on honouring oneself and others, and the capacity to respond to the demands of life. Respect, in this context, means that the capacity and perspective of oneself and others is honoured. The result is empowerment (i.e., the experience of autonomy, self-determination, and the valuing of one's voice). Respectful empowerment creates a positive feedback loop of competence and importance.

Ingold (1999) speaks to autonomy as being inextricable from connection in the hunter-gatherer societies. Autonomy, in this context, is a source of connection but it provides connection in a way that does not create dependencies resulting in disempowerment. Boehm (2012) names individual autonomy, which honours self-determination and one's voice, as a fundamental value embedded in the culture of pre-colonial Ancestors. Within that autonomy is, inherently, respect and the corresponding empowerment that individuals embraced. Individuals in the tribe were given respect by means of the autonomy to make their own decisions, and it was discouraged by the larger group to direct any group member on what to do or how to do something (Boehm, 2012; Gray, 2009). Furthermore, decision making was done by consensus and each person's voice was as valued as the next (Gray, 2009). In pre-colonial life, everyone's perspective was important, and self-determination was highly promoted, from child-rearing practices to daily life activities (Thomas, E., 2006).

Chief Dan George (1974) observes that "There is a longing among all people and creatures to have a sense of purpose and worth. To satisfy that common longing in all of us, we must respect each other." In light of this concept, the fourth quadrant of the Wellness Wheel

names the *value of contribution*, which, when practiced, provides the gift of purpose. This branch explains that, for wellness, we must offer our gifts to others. One must believe that the world is a better place and thus individuals must take on roles that benefit others. When we recognize that, we make the world a better place because we are in it—we experience the gift of purpose. Together with others, contributing purpose creates a positive feedback loop of prosocial contribution and a sense of significance in the world.

Research on pre-colonial hunter-gatherer societies points out that humans have a hardwired, genetic, and biologically adapted need to contribute to others and maintain a sense of purpose, simply because that leads to a sense of belonging. To belong signals safety and survival. Thus, evolutionary speaking, if we are needed in a community, it means that we are safe (Junger, 2016).

Other anthropological research, such as that of Ingold (1999), sheds light on pre-colonial life, the importance of everyone's role, and the consistent willingness to contribute to the community. Ingold (1999) and Junger (2016) speak to the ways that each person knew how they could contribute to the group's well-being and survival, and this provided a deep sense of importance, belonging, and meaningful purpose in one's life. One study demonstrates that, within each pre-colonial community, child-rearing was not specific to one or two individuals but rather was each person's role within the community (Ingold, 1999). Each person contributed to child-rearing, giving them a sense of purpose in the parental role, by providing food and care (Ingold, 1999; Property, 1988).

One's contributions, and the importance of the individual's role in the community, were not limited to child-rearing, whether foraging, hunting, providing teachings, knowing Medicines,

or spiritual practices, each individual was mentored for their strengths and interest, so each person had specific gifts and talents that they would contribute to support the well-being of the group (Ingold, 1999). In this sense, everyone's existence supported the group's survival and was felt viscerally, emphasizing the importance of one's existence, which, in turn, provides individuals with a deep sense of significance in the world (Junger, 2016).

Wellness Constructs

There is a growing body of evidence that shows that identity, ideology, values, and culture are constructs that are associated with wellness. I anticipate that reclaiming Indigenous identity, ideology, values, and culture may be strands that emerge from the research.

Identity Perspective

This research is about the opportunity that exists to reclaim Indigeneity. Identity is a fluid and evolving construct that is continually co-constructed, creating space for individuals to transform their identities from internalized oppression to that of proud Indigeneity. The literature indicates that colonization has deeply wounded Indigenous people's identity and has resulted in internalized oppression (Allard-Tremblay & Coburn, 2023; Brayboy, 2021; Poupart, 2003).

One's identity has an impactful outcome on one's life, choices, decisions, and relationship to oneself (Vignoles et al., 2011). Research reveals that identity is a fundamental concept to wellness (First Nations Health Authority, 2021; Thira, 2021). Interdisciplinary research offers insight from social psychology (Licata & Volpato, 2010), developmental psychology (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995), and postcolonial work (Carroll, 2014; Fabio, 2008) to explain how individuals come to conceive their identity and then shift their identity as a step in healing.

Identity, according to Carroll (2014) is co-developed and socio-culturally co-constructed with all one's relations and experiences. As Charles Taylor (1989) writes, "in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become and where we are going" (p. 47). The concept of oneself is fluid; life experiences, knowledge, and Wisdom shape and are reflected in our overall life's narrative every day (Fabio, 2008). This notion of being continuously in development offers an opportunity every day to re-create oneself (Fabio, 2008).

Identity is co-constructed by making sense of oneself and one's life in relation to a sociocultural context (i.e., their culture) (Ketelaar, 2012). According to Hviid and Villadsen (2018), culture and identity are inextricably and inseparably linked and reciprocal. The raw material on which a person builds their identity is historical and is influenced by current sociocultural factors, but individuals also have a creative inter-independent opportunity for identity development that is intrinsically driven (Fuhrer, 2004; Thira, personal communication, June 2020).

In the context of the existing research, I understand identity as a metaphorical braid consisting of three large strands and, within each strand, hundreds of single hair strands. Each of the single hair strands represents micro causes and experiences that shape identity. The many individual hairs are gathered together into the three themed strands, which are braided to create one unified braid; this braid represents both how identity is constructed and the innumerable influences that create identity. The three larger braid strands represent historical sociocultural influences; the second strand epitomizes current, lived, sociocultural influences; and the third strand represents the opportunity for the individual's intrinsically motivated personal expression, which are all woven together into one braid—the individual's identity.

The first strand of the braid illustrates historical, sociocultural factors. Collective groups share memories and experiences that create a social identity. Historical experiences and how they are represented in the contemporary environment create experiences that tell the social group who they are and where they are going, informing their group identity (Licata & Volpato, 2010; Liu & Hilton, 2005).

The second strand of the braid illustrates contemporary, lived, sociocultural experiences. The concept of oneself is fluid; life experiences, knowledge, and Wisdom are reflected in our overall life's narrative, every day, a narrative that is co-constructed in relation to one's environment and sociocultural relations (Fabio, 3008; Hviid & Villadsen, 2018). This continuous and in-development self offers a daily opportunity to re-create oneself (Fabio, 2008). This is reflected in early research; William James, in his 1891 work, *Principles of psychology,* states that, "across time, we have different experiences and thoughts, and therefore, we have a different self every day. All of these selves pertain to the same and continuous self; an 'unbrokenness in the streams of selves.'" Identity is never fixed and is continually created and re-created in the ways a person engages in their current lived experience, their pre-existing identity, and their sociocultural context (Fabio, 2008).

The third strand of this braid represents the personal, intrinsically driven factors that influence identity. Individuals have an autonomous and personally driven desire to shape the person they want to become (Ketelaar, 2012). The holistic interwoven identity braid is succinctly described by Csikszentmihalyi and Halton (1981) in their work, *The meaning of things*, wherein they demonstrate that individuals create their identity and define meaning in who they are and who they want to become. Individuals make sense of who they are in relation to their current and

historical representations of their sociocultural environment and cultural artifacts, such as musical instruments, family trees, furniture, texts, art, and the like (Ketelaar, 2012). Humans are interdependent within the sociocultural environment and are continually evolving to reflect this relational dependency (Valsiner, 2014). Each person experiences a unique reality, interpreted through the subjective lens of the objective world (Hviid & Villadsen, 2018).

The braid of identity is further explained by Roccas and Sagiv (2010), who state that individuals and their thoughts, ideas, perceptions, worldviews are all influenced and tied to their social context. The environment, social context, and culture all determine peoples' paradigms and psyches. Roccas and Sagiv (2010) ascertain that culture is a dominant influence in shaping an individual's values, beliefs, behaviours and identity. Jost et al. (2001) add another layer to identity construction, realizing that one's perception of another's perceptions of them shapes identity. They found that individuals', groups', and societies' perceptions of another person or group become internalized and influence their identity and self-concept. Identity is so tightly knit that it is inseparable from culture, which shapes values; this is the reason that identity is imperative to the inquiry of Indigenous wellness in a contemporary colonial context.

Ideology Perspective

Thira (2009) summarizes the three colonial waves that disoriented and disrupted Indigenous peoples, their wellness, and identities. The first of these is the *ideological wave*. Ideologies were intentionally stripped from Indigenous people to assimilate them into Western colonial ideology (Thira, 2013). Brayboy (2021) explains that colonization and Eurocentric ideologies created the hierarchies, ultimately placing Indigenous ideologies in a state that strips them of value and marginalizes them.

Allard-Tremblay and Coburn (2023) acknowledge that the efforts to erase Indigenous ideologies were not only historical but an ongoing pursuit that has never been fully achieved. They assert that "ideologies of settler colonialism must be understood both in light of the logic of elimination and in light of the vanishing endpoint of settler colonialism. We need to appreciate how these ideologies shape-shift and return to support a goal that is never fully achieved" (Allard-Tremblay & Coburn, 2023, p. 363). Ideologies shape how individuals, families, communities, and individuals live; they are a latent determinant of nearly all aspects of life, how one relates, interacts, and organizes with the world around them (Fine & Sandstrom, 1993). Western (Gamble, 2009) and Indigenous ideologies (Ermine et al., 1995; Wilson, 2008) are made explicit in this project to discover if there are themes that emerge regarding reclamation of Indigeneity and wellness or a shift in ideology.

Values Perspective

BC First Nations recognize four wellness values; respect, Wisdom, responsibility, and relationships. However, these are simply the overarching values linked to other important values. Indigenous values are explicitly shared across Indigenous cultures in North America, such as the Seven Grandfather Teachings, outlined by Benton-Banai (1988). These comprise the values of Wisdom, love, respect, courage, honesty, truth, and humility. In the book, *Coyote healing*, Mehl-Madrona (2003) lists seven universal principles of behaviour that are teachings offered from living the Indigenous wellness philosophy of the Medicine Wheel. These principles are sharing, caring, kindness, honesty, trust, respect, and humility. Research affirms that one of the defining characteristics of Indigeneity is their shared values within their culture. For example, Marsh et al. (2015) outline the criteria of inclusion of shared values in their use of the word *Aboriginal*;

Aboriginal refers to First Nations (status and non-status Indians), Metis, and Inuit people, as referenced in the Canadian constitution. The term *Aboriginal* is used as a way to respect and acknowledge their shared values, historical residential school experiences, and contemporary struggles in the aftermath of colonization and oppression.

Not only can values guide one's life in a meaningful way that can lead to wellness, but values are also vitally important to survival. Values sustain a culture and a people to ensure their survival in almost any environment, as the guide to show us how to live (Johnston, 1995). Indigenous people in now-Canada are profoundly resilient to have survived the horrendous violence of colonization. This resilience is rooted in the traditional values that have descended from pre-colonial contact and are lived now. Research by Restoule (2004, 2008) found that values that are sustained from pre-colonial contact, and which are lived now by Indigenous individuals, correlate to Indigenous resilience. Core values guided Indigenous peoples' lives pre-contact, and are still guiding Indigenous people. These values, including love, respect, and acceptance, have been passed down through generations and are now uniquely expressed in contemporary life as a source of resilience (Restoule, 2008).

The Western academic tradition also acknowledges the importance of values which guide one's life. Value-behaviour relations affirm that deeply rooted, commonly unconscious values shape people's everyday decisions. Both separate witnesses, Indigenous and Western, agree that values guide behaviour, and values are motivating forces that inspire behaviours that determine daily life actions and choices (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz, 2012). People may act in accordance with their values, even when they do not consciously think about them. Thus, values may operate outside of awareness, but they are available for retrieval from memory.

Values are relatively stable motivational characteristics of persons that change little during adulthood (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003, p. 4).

Schwartz (2012) further states that values are a fundamental predicator for determining one's life. The values one holds play a salient role in determining one's life choices, behaviours, and actions in a circular structure that reflects the corresponding motivation rooted in the person's values. From an Indigenous perspective, values are essential ingredients to wellness, so much so that the Indigenous perception of wellness names specific wellness values—respect, Wisdom, responsibility, and relationships—which lead to wellness if genuinely lived (FNHA, n.d.).

Values are embedded in and inseparable from culture. The literature is replete with examples of values being understood as the latent construct that inspires individuals', families', communities', and Nations' actions, across the spectrum (Fogarty & White, 1994; Roccas & Sagiv, 2010; Schwartz, 1992, 2012). People live their lives guided by underlying values that differ across cultures.

Values guide us in how to live in a socially acceptable way, in alignment with one's culture (Fogarty & White, 1994; Schwartz; 1992). Schwartz (1992) created the theory of basic human values and found several core values, along with the structure of values that align with basic human requirements needed to organize, collaborate, and cooperate. Living by shared values supported and supports our survival.

Culture and Resilience Perspective

Wilson (2004) notes that Indigenous women who have reclaimed their Indigenous cultural values, teachings, and knowledge to guide their lives also support the development of a

positive cultural identity, which leads to improved wellness. The common phrase, *culture is our Medicine*, is cited regularly in the health and wellness field but has Indigenous philosophical and scientific backing. From an Indigenous perspective, Indigenous culture is essential to wellness. To know one's culture and live one's culture provides the gifts of wellness (FNHA, 2017; Thira, 2009). From a Western perspective, research has shown that cultural self-awareness and strong cultural identification is correlated to personal wellbeing. The more one is aware of one's culture and identifies positively with it, the more well one is (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008).

Social action stems from culture. Social action is behaviour, based on individual choices that are both consciously and unconsciously influenced by their values, beliefs, and norms that are embraced within their culture (Billington et al., 1991). Culture is the foundation which shapes and influences social and individual identity and provides a framework to interpret experiences and create meaning (Fuhrer, 2004; Licata & Volpato, 2010; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Thira, 2009). From a constructionist perspective, culture is, at its core, a living, shifting relational process, created by the sum of the historical relational enactments to those of the present day, dependent on social learning to cultivate and maintain culture (Boyd & Richerson, 1996; Crossley, 2015). Culture comprises a group's shared worldview, lifestyle, beliefs, values, knowledge, symbolic systems, and rules that guide behaviour and create shared meaning amongst those within that society (Billington et al., 1991; Gray & Thomas, E., 2006). Given that culture is the foundation of how to live, it appears necessary to explore it when looking at Indigenous wellness.

Culture is a map that guides one's life; without it, one is lost. One's life is largely shaped by the culture one belongs to; this involves an individual's experience, perception of

experiences, choices, behaviours, values, language, social relations, and relations to the external world. Social action stems from culture and encompasses behaviour based on individual choices that are both consciously and unconsciously influenced by values, beliefs, and norms that are embraced within one's culture (Billington et al., 1991).

Contemporary research demonstrates that culture and wellness are strongly correlated for Indigenous people. For example, diabetes rates are lower as proficiency in a traditional language increases (Oster et al., 2014). The more an Indigenous community embraces traditional roles and reclaims the source of community contribution, the more that healing within the community progresses (Thira, 2009). Several studies have shown that suicide rates decrease as cultural roles and cultural continuity increase (Chandler & Dunlop, 2015; Chandler & Lalonde, 2008; Kirmayer et al., 2003; MacDonald et al., 2013). The body of the literature suggests overall that culture must be incorporated as a vital aspect of reclaiming Indigeneity and wellness in contemporary life in colonial Canada.

Summary

It is evident that there is a plethora of theories and literature supporting the idea that colonization has resulted in historical and ongoing colonial trauma, which explains the myriad of challenges Indigenous people face, disproportionately to anyone else in Canada. There is agreement that healing is possible; healing also heals oneself and one's relations—present, future, and ancestral—and the literature supports the notion that holistic healing is necessary, inclusive of Spirit and culture. However, there is a gap in the existing literature of contemporary examples of *how* that healing process is lived. Further, few, if any, studies have investigated how those who have healed can serve as an inspiration for other Indigenous people.

The following chapter addresses the methodologies and methods used in this study. In this work, narrative research approaches are used alongside Indigenous research methodology (IRM) to consciously incorporate elements of relational epistemology.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

Chapter Three provides the research methodological framework of narrative inquiry grounded in Indigenous methodology, then offers the understanding of the methodological concepts of the ontology, epistemology, and axiology and ethics guiding the research. Having established the methodologies, the chapter articulates the methods and analysis used to implement them.

Rationale for an Indigenous, Relational, and Contextual Narrative Enquiry

Selecting methodology is the process one uses to express one's epistemology to gain Wisdom about one's reality (Wilson, 2001). Narrative inquiry methodology, with IRM, provides a framework to conduct research that embraces an interpretivist (Merriam, 1998; Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007; Stake, 1995; Wilson, 2001), subjective (Stake, 1995; Wilson, 2001), constructionist (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995), constructivist (Wilson, 2001; Yin, 2014), and relational constructivist (Watts & Phillips, 2004) viewpoint, that results in narrative inquiry methodology being expanded to include the IRM notion of relational epistemology (Cajete, 2000; Hart, 2010; Wilson, 2008). One's reality is a dynamic, iterative process with independent and interdependent creative opportunities to construct the meaning of one's life as individuals engage with, and are in relation to, themselves, their environment, experiences, and entire life context—social, historical, and cultural (Martin et al., 2003; Merriam, 1998; Wilson, 2001).

This research draws from the experience of Indigenous individuals who offered their narrated stories. The narrative stories and the interview questions were framed in a context of strength-based-narrative interviewing perspective, grounded upon and guided by this Indigenous, relational, and contextual approach. This approach is an act of resistance in the face of the

deficit-based focus of mainstream research into "Indigenous mental health." The historic tragedies and continuing neocolonialism of Indigenous Peoples in Canada have further impacted research approaches focusing on "fixing" the wrongs and shortfalls in Indigenous health. Systemic racism, manifested through colonization and beliefs of White supremacy to support cultural genocide, has contributed to historical and ongoing traumas that continue to support the overuse of deficit-based approaches with Indigenous populations in many disciplines, including Indigenous health. Such an approach "frames and represents Aboriginal identity in a narrative of negativity, deficiency, and disempowerment" (Gorringe, 2015, p. 1), with an assumption that they need to be "fixed" (Lines & Jardine, 2025; Tuck & Yang, 2014).

This research strives to focus on the strengths; the intention is to illuminate and celebrate Indigenous wellness and the individuals living it in the contemporary colonial context. This provides an opportunity for decolonization, as participants reclaim their voice through the narratives shared in the ceremony of the research process (Linley, 2017). The participants are invited to reflect on their experiences within the context of Indigenous relationality in their lives and with me, and a strength-based orientation to inquire about their understanding of wellness and how they live it.

Narrative Inquiry and Indigenous Perspective

This research is an inductive study that employs a narrative inquiry method. Narrative inquiry, from this researcher's perspective, is a social science methodology that aligns with Indigenous ways of being (Cardinal et al., 2019), for Indigenous people to account for their lives, share their story through narration, recollect, re-account, and re-write to make sense of their lives, their relations, and their world.

Clandinin (2006) notes:

> Narrative inquiry is an old practice that may feel new for a variety of reasons. It is a commonplace to note that human beings both live and tell stories about their living. These lived and told stories and talk about those stories are ways we create meaning in our lives as well as ways we enlist each other's help in building our lives and communities (p. 44).

I understand the Indigenous, relational and contextual narrative methodology to be a circle that encompasses the individual, their sociocultural context, the researcher and the participant. The approach is supported by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), who write; "People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context" (p. 2). The circle of relational and contextual narrative methodology is situated within a holistic Indigenous paradigm. My vision of the narrative inquiry circle encapsulates the individual, the researcher, the sociocultural context, and all one's relations within and including the infinite cosmos of Spirit of all that is and was. The circle exists within Spirit, which is and holds an infinite space and time similar to the cosmos but containing the cosmos. The approach is a bringing together and weaving of the holism embodied in each experience into a relationship that is both deeply personal and sacred and inviting the sharing of Wisdom.

Narrative inquiry, inspired by Spirit, is illustrated below, in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Relational Holism of Narrative Inquiry

A Western understanding of narrative inquiry is encapsulated by Barton (2004), who notes that "Narrative inquiry within social science inquiry is based on a belief that when participants are provided with opportunities to narrate and (re)construct stories, they most effectively make sense of experience and the world" (p. 521). In narrative inquiry, *story* is a term that needs explicit definition. For this research, the meaning of story partly aligns with Barton's understanding (2004). Story and narrative theory are considered from a phenomenological and hermeneutic approach.

While mainstream narrative inquiry resonates, it often misses the relational holism central to Indigeneity, the living Spirit of story, that is embraced in this research. However, Barton (2004) embraces this research approach and perspective:

> Hermeneutic phenomenology illuminates what is and brings out that which is taken for granted. As I inquire into what it means to study the experience of living with diabetes, the concepts of culture, health, experience and life become inextricable intertwined. Thus I have come to know phenomenological stories as philosophical stories of experience, using narrative as a means of uncovering the Aboriginal meaning of living with diabetes (p. 521).

This excerpt offered by Barton (2004) provided me with a tingling or resonance, a somatic body-felt alignment with this research. However, I cannot consider the work without acknowledging Spirit. I am a spiritually guided researcher, striving to understand the lived experience of Indigenous wellness, to interpret and illuminate that which is latent and taken-for-granted and invisible, weaving together concepts of culture, colonization, Spirit, health, healing, relations; all tangled and co-creating one's life. In an Indigenous, relational, and contextual narrative methodology, the story is not simply a co-created artifact but a sacred "living" thing—an expression of Spirit. The methodology is a ceremony in itself, as two individuals and all of their relations come together with a shared intention or Spirit of service, to seek wisdom for all Indigenous people as relations. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000):

> Narrative inquiry is about the study of epiphanies, rituals, routines, metaphors, and every-day experiences. Places of inquiry and practice that are filled with complexities, hopes, dreams and intentions. By learning how to frame research puzzles, enter inquiry fields, and compose field and research texts, experience and story are kept central in a qualitative approach that uses narratives to excavate deep understanding and meaning embedded in our lives (p. 519).

With this in mind, there are several elements of the Indigenous, relational, and contextual narrative methodology that I want to emphasize. The first element is that, for this inquiry, relationship with the participant was paramount. In almost every case, we had an established relationship prior to the interview, based on our common relations of shared Indigeneity. Second, the interview space was open to include all relations, and Spirit was a presence that I experienced and honoured all along. It was expressed in insights *epiphanies* and metaphors that came to me or the participants, and we would talk about that and how it was meant to be shared or that we were *visited*. What was unsaid, but mutually assumed, was that Spirit was with us. Third, throughout the interview process, I engaged in my way of living in Indigenous wellness; I would cultivate space for connection to myself and relations with intention. For example, I would have epiphanies regarding the research data and interpretation when I was spending time on the land in intentional reflection, and I had an acknowledged understanding that Spirit was there, re-constructing and reconnecting me to the Spirit of Indigenous wellness.

Simply said, this approach to research provides a formal sacred space for an individual and all their relations. It begins with identifying the emerging themes that support wellness, and the values and constructs that form identity and culture, that emerge from the individual who is in relation with all of their relations in the moment and over time. The methodology, from the perspective of Sonn et al. (2013), is "about centering [Indigenous] voices, knowledge, and experiences but also reflected recognition of stories as a means of exploring dynamics of oppression and as sites of resistance, reclamation, and healing" (p. 295).

It was essential that the methodology I embraced promoted decolonization, which is also an essential principle in Indigenous research as outlined by Wilson (2004). Narrative inquiry in

this research is employed for my personal decolonization and that of the participants, as well as sociocultural decolonization. Hamdan (2009) utilized narrative inquiry as decolonizing methodology and ascertained that it is necessary because, within his work, the research deepened the understanding of Arab Muslim women in contemporary Canadian sociocultural context. Similarly, this research will provide a better understanding of Indigenous people, their perceptions, perspectives, and actions related to how they have achieved Indigenous wellness in the contemporary colonial context.

My aim is that this research will serve as inspiration and impetus for how the broader Canadian society views Indigenous people—shattering White supremacy-based stereotypes and ideologies—and will challenge the internalization of colonization by Indigenous people. Similar to Hamdam's (2009) example of narrative inquiry as a decolonizing methodology, my goal is to use narrative as a method to deconstruct negative and/or limited images, misrepresentations, and stereotypes of Indigenous people. As Hamdan (2009) sought to "show how these Indigenous narratives create images which may be juxtaposed with those perpetrated by Orientalism" (p. 3), this research seeks to juxtapose the narratives presented by the participants with those perpetrated by the colonial images of Indigenous people that are maintained by the broader Canadian society and absorbed by many Indigenous people themselves.

The research uses a framework of open-ended interview questions such as, "Can you please share with me how you understand Indigenous wellness in today's world?" as well as semi-structured questions. To provide a context for each area of inquiry and to provide inspiration for the participants' stories, Indigenous cultural constructs of wellness were invited

into the conversation, including the holistic vision of the four quadrants of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness.

Appreciative Inquiry

This research draws on the strengths of appreciative inquiry to support the narrative interview process. Although appreciative inquiry was originally developed for organizational development, its utility and benefits are being acknowledged as a research approach that aligns with the Indigenous context (Cram, 2010), with IRM (Chilisa, 2012), with social work (Bellinger & Elliott, 2011), and with psychology within strength-based assessments and it also aligns with positive psychology (Whitney & Fredrickson, 2015). The appreciative inquiry interviews offer a voice to individuals who are often silenced, therefore, the strength-based strands of the individual narrative accounts provide the opportunity for decolonization, healing, and emancipation, which harmoniously align with Indigenous research (Kovach, 2010b; Thira, 2013; Wilson, 2008).

Ontology

Ontology is one's conception about the nature of reality; that is, what is real in the world (Wilson, 2001). Narrative inquiry can embrace ontologically different paradigms (Järvensivu & Tornroos, 2010; Tight, 2017). Narrative inquiry can be adapted to a diverse context to reflect and support ontological stances along the continuum from constructionism to constructivism, and can uphold the principles of IRM through a process of *weaving*. According to Ryder et al. (2020), "when weaving a methodology for 'research at the interface,' the two diverse knowledge systems and worldviews, Indigenous and Western, do not just sit over the top of each other and overlap, they intertwine, are weaved together, to ensure structural integrity" (p. 6).

Both IRM and narrative inquiry embrace social constructionism and the perspective that individual subjective realities and relationally constructed and shared experiences create one's reality (Hart, 2010; Wilson, 2001). Social constructionism denies "the idea about how observations are an accurate reflection of the world that is being observed" (Murphy et al., 1998). Hammersley (1992) and Andrews (2012) both note that social constructionism is essentially an anti-realist, relativist stance. Social constructionism acknowledges that the inquiry of the social sphere, inclusive of relationships, is paramount in alignment with IRM. Further, "constructivism proposes that each individual mentally constructs the world of experience through cognitive processes while social constructionism has a social rather than an individual focus" (Andrews, 2012, p. 39).

For this research, narrative inquiry is adopted which understands reality as subjective, multiple, and socially and interpersonally constructed; however, the Spirit of this research lies on a continuum that embraces both the personal and interpersonal influences and is a determination of one's subjective reality. The social constructionist ontology also honours relationality as a collaborative process in creating knowledge with the researcher and participants (Losantos et al., 2016). Social constructionism accounts for an imperative interdependent context, including the historical and cultural context of those involved (Cisneros-Puebla, 2007; Gergen, 1989). The theories and findings are embedded and are understood as a product relevant to a given sociocultural context and society during a specific time period (Losantos et al., 2016).

Therefore, my role as a researcher must also be taken into account, as previously discussed. The interview process is a social and relational engagement. Together, we co-create our realities, honouring social constructionism. However, at the same time, there is room to

uphold independence and self-determination, where I, and the participants, independently create meaning of the experience, which makes space to uphold the constructivist ontology. As Kanselaar (2002) notes, "Constructivism implies that learners are encouraged to construct their own knowledge … Central to constructivist pedagogy is the idea of learning as meaning-making, and learning as the negotiation of meaning" (p. 1).

Within an Indigenous paradigm, the narrative inquiry ontology is expanded beyond social constructionism and constructivism; it is grounded in holism and Spirit (Cajete, 2000; Hart, 2010; Meyer, 2008; Rice, 2005). Indigenous ontology goes beyond interpersonal relationships and honours the notion that knowledge is found in relation to interpersonal and external relationships that are braided into one's experience as part of who they are, and they become a part-fit, as one relation (Wilson, 2001). Indigenous ontology accepts the interplay and relationship between the spiritual and the physical, in order for one to know reality (Hart, 2010). The differentiating feature of Indigenous ontology compared to social constructionism is that social constructionism does not address spiritual realities, and IRM does (Maréchal, 2010). I understand this to be the ontology behind Indigenous people using the term *all my relations*, acknowledging that we are not separate from anyone and that all our relations are part of us.

This ontological stance of constructivism, social constructionism, and Indigenous relationality is reflected in the research question that is based on an Indigenous individual's subjective lived experience and their relationship to their reality, reflected in their life's narrative. An individual's constructed version of their narrative is their truth and is taken at face value. This research learns from the participants thriving in contemporary ways, and who have

reclaimed and revitalized their Indigeneity, and it honours the spiritual and physical intersect in relation to the individual and their wellness.

Epistemology

> Epistemology is the study of how one comes to know reality.
>
> Wilson (2008), *Research is ceremony.*

> *The transformation mask is one of the most dramatic carvings of the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples. It depicts the inner and outer being. The dancer emerges from behind a dance screen with the mask in a closed position. As the dance proceeds, the dancer whirls about and the mask snaps open to reveal the inner being. This mask, carved from red cedar, presents the raven on the outside. Bak'wa, the wild man of the woods appears within* (Vancouver International Airport).

The teaching I received from this story tells of Indigenous epistemology and reveals that there are layers that, together, construct oneself and one's episteme. The inner being represents the constructivist aspect of each individual—there is an aspect of each person that is individual, intrinsic to the person, that is represented by the inner man mask carving. The outer being that covers over the inner man mask carving is the outer raven head, which represents the external relational aspects of our being, the social constructionist perspective. Lastly, the story explicitly acknowledges the material of the mask, red cedar, which implicitly represents relationality, and, further, how all relations are a part of oneself; this represents both the relational constructivist and Indigenous relational constructivist perspectives of an individual.

This research embraces a transdisciplinary perspective and braids in the strengths and contributions from various epistemologies that, for this research, serve as a guide to what I

understand to be a contemporary Indigenous paradigm that embraces an epistemology of relational constructivism that stems from the discipline of psychology:

> A relational constructivist position … accounts for both the social-embedded nature of human knowledge and the personal agency of creative and self-reflective individuals within relationships. [It] states that the individual arises from the social but is not the same as, or reducible to, the social … [It is] one that does not view humans in a reductionistic manner … accounting for and affirming that knowledge and experience is a co-construction of self and others in a socially embedded matrix (Watts & Phillips, 2004, p. 141).

Relational constructivism is an epistemology that honours both the cognitive constructivist and social constructionist perspectives, which together create one's reality (Martinet al., 2003; Watts & Phillips, 2004). From my perspective, it seems that both IRM and narrative inquiry have the flexibility to embrace relational constructivism, while IMR also includes the broader relational connections which contribute to one coming to know reality. This clarifying point diverges from the initial intention of what Watts and Phillips (2004) coined *relational constructivism* to a holistic context of Indigenous relational constructivism, inclusive of all one's relations and Spirit.

Using a transdisciplinary approach, the paradigmatic perspectives of constructionism, constructivism, and relational constructivism are not compared and contrasted, but each is embraced for its strengths, achieving a rich juxtaposition that creates an opportunity for an Indigenous relational constructivism to emerge. Guided by the work of Wilson (2004), this research encompasses a ceremonial process that facilitates the braiding together of constructivism, constructionism, and all one's relations, so that knowledge and Wisdom are born through the

voices of the participants (Wilson, 2008). Relational constructivism is not named but exemplified in Wilson's (2001) narrative on Indigenous epistemology:

> I had a discussion last fall with some of the other participants in my research, and it was not just about gaining knowledge from them, it was like mixing information, gathering, sharing, and analysis. Much of what I am learning I have been learning all my life, so it is a matter of checking in with other people, "Am I on the right track?" It involves coming to an agreement about a mutually understood idea. The research is building the relationship with the idea of an Indigenous psychology and the idea of an Indigenous research paradigm. Indigenous people need to do Indigenous research because we have the lifelong learning and relationship that goes into it. You are not just gaining information from people; you are sharing your information. You are analyzing and you are building ideas and relationships, as well. Research is not just something that's out there; it's something that you're building for yourself and for your community (p. 179).

Wilson (2001) exemplifies, in this statement, the paramount importance of constructionism in Indigenous epistemology as he explains what he has come to know throughout his life as a mutually co-created idea. However, there is a deep reflection and independent processing with oneself needed in order to generate and construct ideas, which exhibits constructivist epistemology. It is apparent that these separate epistemologies are not mutually exclusive but interdependent and related in the co-construction of Wisdom (Martin & Sugarman, 2003; Watts & Phillips, 2004).

The notion that Indigenous epistemology shares the perspective of social constructionism is visible in the research process. However, IRM is unique in that this

epistemology is more holistic because it is inclusive of all one's relations and is embedded within ceremony. One of the ceremonial steps is to create a space and invite in one's relations for Wisdom making (Wilson, 2008). This aligns with the fundamental belief that knowledge cannot be obtained independently; it is through, and in company with, one's relations, that knowledge can be received and learned through the relational and embodied process, such as ceremony (Wilson, 2008).

In the context of Western psychology, Watts (2017) directly speaks to relational constructivism. A similar phenomenon is acknowledged within the field of psychotherapy. Martin et al. (2003) assert that both epistemologies are true at different stages of human development and within different contexts. Martin et al. (2003) published an influential article on psychotherapeutic change that honours both the social constructionist and cognitive constructivist view of how one develops their epistemology, personhood, and reality, and bridges the two by articulating and demonstrating the scientific alignment of both necessary and interdependent epistemologies within a person's psychology.

There is a common epistemological thread within the existing literature that aligns with IRM. Psychotherapy literature articulates the fact that the debate is not about the social constructionist or constructivist perspective, but rather the social constructionist *and* constructivist, both simultaneously engaging with the individual. This research integrates both and then steps further to embrace all one's relations, in order to be authentic in IRM.

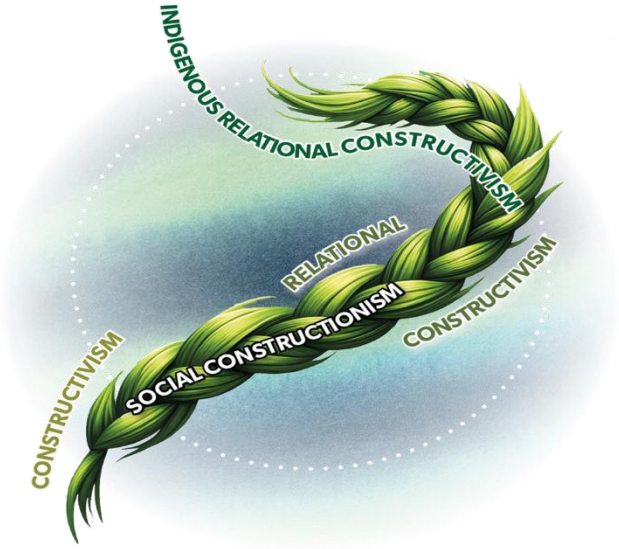
For my research, I embodied a perspective that the individual, sociocultural, and Indigenous relational context co-create a lived experience and individual meaning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Thira, 2013, Wilson, 2004). This research explores the myriad sources of

wellness—narrative inquiry can capture this complexity alongside Indigenous epistemology (Cardinal et al., 2019). One comes to know their reality through co-constructed experiences with one's relations and environment, personally integrated, processed, and interpreted to inject meaning.

The epistemology of this research is understood as a continuous balance of four elements depicted in Figure 5, below; constructivism, which places the emphasis of human autonomy and personhood on the individual and their intrinsic processes; social constructionism, which emphasizes personhood on extrinsic factors, such as environment and relationships; relational constructivism, which is the bridge between social constructionism and constructivism, and, finally, Indigenous relational constructivism, embracing all one's relations in the cosmos, inclusive of Spirit (represented by the blue background).

Figure 5

Indigenous Relational Constructivism Transdisciplinary Epistemology Braid



Axiology

Axiology asserts what is valued within a paradigm. Axiology, Wilson (2001) notes, is a set of morals or a set of ethics; "The axiology, the ethics and judgment of which research is worthy of doing are different for different research paradigms" (p. 175). Those guidelines that informed my work are outlined below.

Indigenous and Research Ethics. The ethical considerations are a collection of principles that are supportive of Indigenous research and in alignment with Western ethical principles. The ethical principles which guide this project are inclusive of the IRM, put forward by Wilson (2008) and Kovach (2010b), the requirements of Royal Roads' research ethics board, and the Canada tri-council policy statement: Ethical conduct for research involving humans—TCPS 2 (2022), chapter 9: Research involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada. The set of principles covered include decolonization, beneficence and applicability of the research, relationality, embodiment and integrity, reflexivity of the researcher, aboriginal engagement, recognition of the role of Elders and other knowledge holders, consent, privacy, and confidentiality, and the interpretation and dissemination of the research results.

Decolonization

This research is decolonizing in a number of ways. First, it is a source of reconnection to Indigenous wellness. Bird (2013) and Wilson (2008) explain that colonization, at its essence, is understood to be disconnection. Colonization has deliberately disconnected Indigenous people from all their relations and their episteme (Greenwood, 2012; Wilson, 2008). At its core, IRM situates itself within a relational context to bring relations and knowledge closer to one another, re-searching and reconnecting Wisdom, relations, and episteme (Wilson, 2008). Decolonization

is understood, within the research context, to be action toward reconnection (Bird, 2013; Wilson, 2008). From a psychopathology perspective, world-renowned trauma expert Gabor Maté (2011) states that trauma is a disconnection from oneself. IRM supports reconnection, which is trauma healing. IRM is healing. Decolonization is reclaiming ourselves, reconnecting to our relationships, and healing our relationships (Wilson, 2008). Rebuilding those relationships is decolonizing the mind (Bird, 2013).

Second, this research is active resistance to mainstream conceptions of what it is to be Indigenous through storytelling. Storytelling as methodology is central to learning and understanding colonial histories and legacies but also in constructing identities in the present (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999). This includes claiming testimonies, storytelling, celebrating survival/survivance, remembering, connecting, revitalizing, and regenerating. Kirmayer et al. (2011) note that collective forms of narrative afford people the opportunity to make sense of their experience, to construct a valued identity, and to ensure the continuity and vitality of a community or a people. Gonzalez et al. (2014) emphasize the need to recognize the many stories Indigenous peoples have to tell; “Stories about loss. Stories about suffering. Stories about pain. Stories of genocide and destruction. But there are also stories of survival. Stories about resilience. Stories about pride … stories about healing” (p. 32). The authors express the notion that, as Indigenous peoples, they “want to talk about who [they] are, where [they] come from, and the great trauma that [they] have survived and continue to face so that [they] can learn to heal together” (Gonzalez et al., 2014, p. 32). These different authors have highlighted the idea that, while many Aboriginal people are well aware of the oppressive forces at work in their everyday lives, they need opportunities to tell their stories (Quayle & Sonn, 2019, p. 48).

This research has sought to provide exactly these opportunities while it challenges the colonial stereotypes of Indigenous people. It recreates positive and vibrant stories from the participants of Indigenous thriving and reclaimed Indigenous identities in the present context. This research focuses on the solutions, and not the problems; the problems, however, still emerge to provide context to further celebrate resilience.

Third, this research explicitly challenges and names the mainstream discourses and offers other solutions that challenge and de-center the power and primacy of mainstream discourses (Dudgeon, & Walker, 2015). I have opted to use terms such as *colonial trauma* and *colonial coping*, compared to current mainstream terms such as "Indigenous trauma," which places the trauma on Indigenous people, as though it is ours to own. I argue that is it not; it belongs to colonization and has been placed upon us without our consent. There are a number of instances in this paper that challenge White supremacy, and they are made explicit throughout with definition, punctuation, and context to make them known; it is intentional.

Fourth, this research addresses the fact that Indigenous people have not been always represented in Indigenous research and their voices have not been illuminated (Dudgeon & Walker, 2015). I agree with Dudgeon and Walker (2015), who note that "Part of the decolonizing project for Indigenous people and psychologists then is to challenge these imposed representations and determine and define Indigenous social and cultural realities and representations" (p. 286). This research is centered on making space to honour and hear from Indigenous people about their lives and experience. As individuals contribute with their voices to the research, not only are they offering a gift to others with similar experiences, but I hope they will benefit and experience enhanced empowerment, liberation, and decolonization, and gain a

deepened sense of pride, purpose, and connection that appreciative inquiry and strength-based narrative interviews can offer (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Thira, 2013).

Advantages and Applicability of the Research

Research must be of benefit and have the intention to be applied into one's life as a source of Wisdom for self and others (Wilson, 2008). This research has three core strands of beneficence for several groups of people.

Solutions for Indigenous People

The research is intended to provide a contemporary contextual model of cultural wellness, including lived examples of how Indigenous people are reclaiming wellness. The research deconstructs internalized colonization and offers contemporary examples of the reclamation of Indigeneity that transcends stereotypes about what it means to be Indigenous. The research is meant to inspire others to reclaim their wellness and Indigeneity, with real-life stories of how it can be done. The research offers possible solutions for others to take steps toward wellness and is intended to be an impetus for personal investigation and vision for personal and relational wellness.

Benefits to Participants

The interview process was intended to honour the wellness expert and role model participants' healing and support them as they reclaimed the pride to acknowledge their Wisdom and validate the importance of their contributions—directly and as role models. It provided acknowledgement of their gifts of knowledge or contributions to themselves, their families, and communities through living a life of embodied wellness. In the narrative interviews, appreciative inquiry approaches supported the vision of honouring and upholding participants' narratives in a

celebratory Spirit. Within the context of the interview process, interviews embraced strength-based and positive psychology perspectives; this meant that interview questions were framed to illuminate successes and how they were achieved, and the questions honoured the participants by focusing on their strengths. The interview process was intended to leave the participants feeling proud and empowered. The strength-based approach is culturally appropriate for many Indigenous populations (Thira, 2013).

The interview experience offered the participants an opportunity to come to understand their own experiences with greater clarity and to recognize the wisdom they carry and the contributions they shared, as they articulated their conversation. It also provided an opportunity to notice how participants were and are seen by those who acknowledge their wellness and living in a wise way.

Advantages to the Academy

Another strand of benefit is the contribution of the research methodology to the academy. This research strives to expand on IRM to provide an exemplar of contemporary IRM that embraces and braids in strands of the narrative inquiry into the ceremonial research. This research articulates the synergies of the complementary methodologies and demonstrates how contemporary Western methodologies can be brought to support IRM and research within an Indigenous paradigm. This will not only increase the value of research with Indigenous people but could enrich narrative inquiry and other methodologies more broadly.

As a published dissertation, this paper will offer future researchers the ability to draw on both the research process and the findings, to support their approaches and knowledge about Indigenous identity reclamation.

Benefits to the Researcher

Finally, the research has benefits for me, as the researcher and co-creator of this research process. Through the research, I am gaining Wisdom. I benefit from personal decolonization as I deconstruct, inquire, research, explore, strive to embody wellness, and integrate the teachings I gain through this process. I have the benefit of privileging my voice as an Indigenous researcher and redefining wellness and my Indigeneity with the support of this research process, my committee, and the participants in a colonial academic context. I am being transformed through this process and becoming whole. I already have experienced this, and I am merely at the beginning of this journey.

Relationality

Relationality is essential to who I am. I chose to be guided by both narrative inquiry (Green, 2013) and Indigenous research methodology (Kovach, 2010a; Wilson, 2008) because they uphold the primacy of relationship in research. Within the research context, relationality is a critical ethical criterion that must be upheld and navigated with deep respect within IRM and the entirety of the research process. Without relationship, knowledge creation is inconceivable and, therefore, relationality is prioritized. The interviews will create space and openness to expand the conception of relations beyond the human-to-human to include all one's relations.

As an Indigenous person who has committed the entirety of her life's work to Indigenous wellness, I have many Indigenous peers with whom I have been in a relationship for decades. These relationships built the foundation of my research participant recruitment for the wellness experts—these individuals know and trust me. They trust that the research I am doing is for our greater well-being as Indigenous people. Relationality encompasses all one's relations and

experiences, past and present, and personal relationships to self. Relationality, within the Indigenous context, includes Ancestors, spiritual relations, those not yet born, the environment, and the land.

I connected with wellness role models through their nomination by wellness experts. The nomination process enhanced trust building and safety between the researcher and the wellness role models. The nomination process built a bridge with Indigenous individuals who have every reason to be mistrustful of research, considering how traditional, cultural, and lived experience have been so regularly appropriated by researchers as a colonial enterprise to pathologize or propagate the identity of the "expert" by non-Indigenous researchers.

Without a trust relationship, this research could not proceed. I trust, respect, and honour the individuals with whom I come into relationship, and I want to illuminate their voices. The relationships with the participants began before this research and will extend beyond this research; they are lifelong connections to my Indigenous relations and the people I admire who are knowledge holders and role models in wellness. This means that our relationship does not start and end with this research, rather, this research is merely a season in my life-long relational connection to these individuals. This research is important but not more important than maintaining and ensuring the wellness and sustainability of my relationships. The sustainability of my relationships with those involved in the research shapes my overall research perspective and trumps the research process and the research itself.

Within IRM, the principle of respect is necessary to achieve quality criteria (Kovach, 2010b; Wilson, 2008). Respect must span the research continuum, encompassing myself and my relations within the research context. First, I offer respect to myself. I offer this through my

voice. It is imperative in IRM that I embrace my moral obligation to reclaim my Indigenous voice, to speak and work in a way my Ancestors and future generations would be proud to see (Sium & Ritskes, 2013).

Secondly, I offer respect through how I live throughout the research process. I offer myself time and space to check in and meet my own needs, as required, to maintain mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual harmony within my life as I live the cultural teachings bestowed upon me. I offer respect through the process and methodology of this research. I have a deep regard for traditional and contemporary Aboriginal ceremonies and rituals that offer the teachings and practices that keep one grounded and connected to our relations. From my lived experience, there is immense Wisdom in Aboriginal ceremonies that point to how one is to live and the values that guide their life. When the teachings offered in the ceremony are brought to life as Wisdom, the results are the gifts of wellness and a thriving life. Living a ceremonial life means practicing daily rituals, which support me in maintaining a relational connection to all beings, daily. This sustains my humility and enables me to live in harmony with my relations. I have experienced ceremonies and rituals, not just in Indigenous cultures in Canada, but in others.

I believe each ceremony is an opportunity, a door to reconnection to oneself and one's relations. IRM is aligned with ceremonial steps that guide me as I attempt to live a life of integrity throughout this research process. I have a responsibility to live and do this research in a way that demonstrates my respect for this ceremony and the relations within it. Relationality is a worldview I deeply embrace and is the source of inspiration for doing this research. Everything with which I am in relation, throughout the course of this research, contributes to my thoughts and actions and will inspire the wisdom that emerges as a result of all the co-constructed and

inter-dependent relations. I embrace the belief that, if I live in alignment with a ceremonial life guided by Indigenous values, there will be positive relational outcomes of this research.

Within IRM, the principle of reciprocity within the relationship is essential (Wilson, 2001). Reciprocity stresses the importance of a balanced relationship; what one gives, one will, in turn, receive. One gesture of reciprocity, to honour our relationships and the participants' contributions to this project, I provided a culturally appropriate gift of traditional Medicines, picked by my aunt in ceremony. I let each participant know about the Medicine and who prepared it, to acknowledge and honour their gifts to this research and their contributing purpose. The choice of gift was also intended to also support their ongoing wellness.

When a story is shared, and words are put to the human experience, one realizes that others have similar experiences, which provides a sense of connection and belonging (Douglas, 2016). This sharing can provide a new understanding of that experience, which an individual may not have been able to articulate or consolidate previously. Integrating a person's experiences in this way supports them in coming into a closer relationship with their life's narrative and with themselves (Barton, 2004; Douglas, 2016). Within the context of reclaiming Indigeneity, the researcher gains voice and emancipation and undergoes decolonization through their writing; the reader also gains this opportunity, and thus, the relationship is reciprocated (Douglas, 2016; McGuire-Adams, 2020). Informed by this research process, once the dissertation is published, a copy will be sent to each participant to acknowledge their contribution.

I hold deep reverence for the participants in this research. The research interview is intended to be a gesture of honouring and a demonstration of my respect for the participants for the gifts they offer me of their time, presence, and Wisdom. A narrative approach in this research

privileges the Indigenous individual's experience, which can be immensely valuable and emancipatory for the them, and for those who identify with a shared experience (Ellis, 2015). The research participants are people for whom I have great admiration; they are much-needed role models and they represent hope and Wisdom. Participants of this research come from historical experiences of multifaceted trauma and historical and ongoing oppression, racism, and discrimination; despite this, these individuals have reclaimed their wellness. I consider them to be highly resilient, strong, and a force of transformation and healing for Indigenous families, communities, and Nations. My embodied reverence and respect for the participants will filter into my macro actions and relations with them; my aim was and is to offer respect in all the interactions within this project.

Finally, relationality is an inspiration for this research. It is about my relationship with myself and my relations. As I have gained and continue to gain a new relationship with my Indigeneity and to reclaim wellness, I have become a more balanced person; I am more kind, more at peace, more open-minded, and patient, my relationships have improved, and my lifestyle has shifted to a more harmonious lifestyle with all my relations. Now, I am eager to learn from others who have gone through their reclamation process. Through my story and the participants' stories and the support of a systematic inquiry process, I can uncover and identify possible thematic or theoretical approaches we are unknowingly engaging with and, with this new knowledge, complemented by encouraging stories, hopefully, I will inspire others.

Embodiment and Integrity

Re-searching wellness requires a mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical connection to oneself and all one's relations (Kovach, 2010a; Wilson, 2008). From this perspective, re-search

is an embodied, integrated, holistic, and spiritual ceremony. The researcher is required to live in a ceremonial way, open to receiving guidance and Wisdom to support the project and infuse teachings throughout the project from all their relations; this is the integrity required for IRM (Wilson, 2008). IRM is the only methodology that embraces the broader relationality of an interconnected, co-created, holistic, and embodied approach with aligning personal values that one needs in order to live in congruence with integrity (Wilson, 2008). Therefore, it is self-evident that IRM is an aligned methodology to guide this research. Essentially, IRM articulates how I strive to exist with deep, connected, holistic and aligned authenticity and integrity in life. My integrity extends into this research, as it is part of my life as one and the same. This process produces knowledge, which, when lived, becomes Wisdom.

Within IRM, the embodiment of knowledge is crucial and living it is integrity (Wilson, 2008). Knowledge is knowing information; Wisdom is integrating knowledge into one's life. Within IRM, new knowledge is incorporated into one's lifestyle. Wilson (2008) states that, "if it doesn't make a difference in your life, it doesn't matter; it's not Indigenous. It is re-searching for something that matters to the researcher, and to their relations." This research is already an embodied experiment I am living; I am looking to other participants with similar life experiences to identify emerging themes that could lead others down a healing path to reclaiming wellness and Indigeneity.

Reflexivity of the Researcher

As an Indigenous person, I have a shared history of colonial trauma with the participants that impacts all our relations and consider many as relations in the broader sense, as we are connected by distant family members, friends, and mutual acquaintances. Our shared trauma

history is a source of empathetic and compassionate connection that can be inspiration to see one another thrive and contribute to Indigenous success. I believe the participants see me as a member of the Indigenous wellness community and co survivor of colonial trauma. The wellness experts witnessed me striving to live in wellness and contributing actively to other Indigenous people's and communities' wellness. They have witnessed my growth and educational journey as a colleague when we crossed paths at Indigenous gatherings and we maintained connection through social media. In the research context, they may see me as a young, energetic student confronting colonization and seeking to be part of a positive healing through reclamation of culture in this contemporary life. They may see me as an example of a wellness role model.

In addition, the participants may have seen me as someone who is safe, worthy of respect, and someone who would honour them and their time because of the referral from the wellness experts whom they knew, trusted, and respected. They potentially saw me as an Indigenous role model, and, with our shared Indigeneity, also striving to heal and thrive in the face of colonization. They may see me as someone trying to use the colonial institution of education for positive change and decolonization as a source of cultural reclamation instead of a source of colonization and trauma and honour that, which is why I suspect they agreed to participate and contribute.

Indigenous Engagement

Article 9.1 in the TCPS 2 (2022) requires community engagement in Indigenous research when the research is being applied, is relevant to, or there is impact to the welfare of a specific Indigenous community. Based on the nature and extent of community engagement in the research, it identifies what approach is appropriate in various types of research. The policy

provides examples of community engagement and context to help discern when and if it is needed, for instance:

> Interviewing a sample of individuals of Indigenous ancestry across Canada on the impact of a policy on their lives, where the results are not attributable to, or likely to affect, the community or communities with which they may identify.
>
> First Nations, Inuit, and Métis persons, whether or not they identify as members of an Indigenous community, enjoy freedom of expression, as does any citizen. They are free to consent and to participate in research projects that they consider to be of personal or social benefit. If the project is unlikely to affect the welfare of the individuals' communities, local community engagement is not required under this Policy. The necessity or desirability of engaging regional or national representatives of Indigenous communities in policy research may, however, be determined by other considerations. (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2022).

My research involves a variety of Indigenous individuals from all over Canada, some who were working with their home community, some who worked as guests in various communities, and many who worked in an urban context and were not directly affiliated with any First Nation community. These individuals freely consented to participate, representing themselves and their unique experience of and expression of Indigeneity, rather than as members of a specific community. This research concerns individuals' conceptions of wellness and how it

is lived and is not intended to represent any specific Indigenous group. The Indigenous participants represented their own personal identities and perceptions.

Recognition of the Role of Elders and Other Knowledge Holders

Article 9.15 of the TCPS 2 (2022) articulates the importance of properly recognizing those knowledge holders and Elders within research:

> Researchers should engage the community in identifying Elders or other recognized knowledge holders to participate in the design and execution of research, and the interpretation of findings in the context of cultural norms and traditional knowledge. Community advice should also be sought to determine appropriate recognition for the unique advisory role fulfilled by these persons.

In this research, wellness experts can be understood to play the honorary role of a knowledge keeper in a contemporary Indigenous context. I have come to understand from my teachings that knowledge holders carry teachings and Wisdom that they have received in their lives to share for the wellness of other Indigenous people.

All of the Indigenous wellness experts were selected by their respective Indigenous community, Aboriginal organization, or affiliation to take on wellness leadership roles, such as a health director or wellness counsellors. In many ways, this is a traditional act played out in a contemporary colonial context, where an Elder or knowledge holder is recognized by an Indigenous or Aboriginal collective based on merit and this collective formally appoints them in their roles to represent and serve to promote wellness. The Indigenous wellness experts were directly engaged to offer their vision of Indigenous wellness, which facilitated the co-creation of a culturally contextualized exploration of contemporary Indigenous wellness.

Wellness role models, as exemplars of living in Indigenous wellness, would not typically nominate or consider themselves as an Indigenous wellness role models. This is due to the value of humility within the Indigenous cultures, and it is common within the Indigenous paradigm to value embodied, lived, Wisdom. Therefore, one may be living strands of wellness without consciously realizing that one is living in a wise way. With this in mind, the wellness experts were invited to identify Indigenous people they knew who were living in a good way. By engaging with the wellness experts, appointed by virtue of their formal roles in Indigenous and Aboriginal wellness, they created the model of wellness and nominated the wellness role model participants. Together, both groups contributed to the co-creation of the understanding of Indigenous wellness through a contemporary post-colonial approach.

Consent, Privacy, and Confidentiality

Article 9.16 of the TCPS 2 (2022) notes that:

> Researchers and community partners shall address privacy and confidentiality for communities and individuals early on in the community engagement process. Research agreements, where they exist, shall address whether part or all of the personal information related to the research will be disclosed to community partners. Researchers shall not disclose personal information to community partners without the participant's consent.

Participation in this research was entirely voluntary. The research is intended to benefit and promote wellness for participants and readers. Participants could withdraw from the project at any time. I connected to wellness expert participants through existing relationships as colleagues working within the Indigenous wellness field. Colleagues, in this context, are

individuals with whom there is no conflict of interest, and with whom there is equanimity in power relations. Power relations are relationships in which one person has social-formative power over another, and can influence or coerce the individual to behave a certain way, or take specific action. These individuals have well-established careers, they embrace their empowerment in their leadership roles, and they often will have an equivalent combination of education and experience. This means that, if they volunteer to partake in the research or not, it will have no negative impact on their lives. Their volunteering to participate would come from a place of willingness to genuinely contribute to this work because of their gifts, expertise, commitment, and passion on the topic of Indigenous wellness. For example, if I choose to connect with a colleague who is the director of an Indigenous organization and they decline the invitation to participate, there would be no negative impact as a result.

This research study is celebratory and was not intended to be confidential. This was discussed with the participants at the outset and they were in agreement. The nomination-based recruitment approach for participants is culturally appropriate. My teachings say that, when someone has a gift or strength, one does not personally declare that strength unless they are acknowledged and invited to share by a community leader, such as a chief, Elder, or knowledge holder, as a responsibility and an honour. Wellness role models must be nominated by knowledge holders within a community; it would not be appropriate for self-nomination because of cultural incongruence and the value of humility and respect for knowledge holders in the community. It is the role of knowledge holders to define and acknowledge who are the wellness role models for the community.

Wellness experts were asked to put forward the names of people they saw demonstrating wellness; this was a nominating process where wellness role models are honoured and recognized by someone important in their community for positive contributions toward themselves, their family, and their community. The entirety of the nomination process was transparent to all participants. This meant that the celebratory examples of how wellness experts witness wellness role models, living in wellness, were made explicit. The wellness role models were made aware of who nominated them to participate as wellness role models and what the wellness experts appreciated and acknowledged about how they are demonstrating wellness. For ethical purposes, the wellness experts and role models were informed of the interview selection protocol prior to engaging in an interview process, and they could decline to participate. All participants were offered the opportunity to choose an alias name, if they saw fit.

Interpretation and Dissemination of Research Results

Article 9.17 of the TCPS 2 (2022) requires that the participants of research should be involved and collaborated with to self-determine the interpretation and communication of their contributions, in order to ensure their voice is upheld in a manner that honours it as they intended. According to TCPS 2 (2022):

> Researchers should afford community representatives engaged in collaborative research an opportunity to participate in the interpretation of the data and the review of research findings before the completion of the final report, and before finalizing all relevant publications resulting from the research.

Following an iterative and collaborative process, the participants were re-engaged through an invitation to review the words they shared that were selected for inclusion in the

results section. This was to ensure not only fidelity but to confirm that their voice represented their intention. Upon completion of the results draft, which included all the quotes and embedded within the thematic interpretations, the participants were offered the opportunity to review the material to ensure their agreement with how the words were interpreted and conveyed.

Analysis

Prior to entering academia, I was taught that traditional Wisdom was kept alive through the living threads of stories that were the continuous gift to be passed from one generation to the next. In academia, stories are still honoured, but the stories emerge from data that is analyzed and told through analysis. The participants generously shared their relationally embedded stories and I used inductive qualitative analysis to sit with them and find their resonance within their holistic significance. The inductive qualitative approach facilitates an emergent approach without preconceptions of what is being analyzed (Clarke & Braun, 2014; Thomas, 2006).

This approach allows the researcher to maintain curiosity and notice data that materializes from the raw narratives. A thematic inductive method analyzes the data from a grassroots or bottom-up perspective. The data are looked at without preconceived codes or themes and are analyzed with openness and curiosity, to uncover emergent codes and themes (Aronson, 1994; Clarke & Braun, 2014). As Thomas, (2006) notes, “Inductive analysis refers to approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher” (p. 238).

Thematic analysis is a systematic method used to sort and organize the data and facilitate the organization of emergent patterns, themes, and embedded meaning that comes about from the qualitative data (Aronson, 1994; Clarke & Braun, 2014; Thomas, 006). Thematic analysis

supports the researcher in making sense of the data and in deriving meaning from the data. Also, thematic analysis brings the ability for the method to look across data sets and find surprises and similarities in the way that experiences are shared (Aronson, 1994; Clarke & Braun, 2014). Thematic analysis highlights patterns that emerge from what participants share in the context of, and in relationship with, research questions on contemporary Indigenous wellness (Clarke & Braun, 2014).

The thematic analysis process is consistent for both the wellness experts and wellness role models; however, the analysis reflects the different contexts of the participants. First, the research examines the text to uncover the core meanings evident in the text, relevant to the research purpose. This research uncovered how wellness was explained and conceptualized by wellness experts and how success in wellness was achieved and described through their stories. This initial phase provides the foundation for how contemporary Indigenous wellness is conceptualized by wise wellness leaders.

The second phase focuses on the wellness role models. The data were analyzed to illuminate perspectives, values, behaviours, relationships, motivations, decisions and other contributors to Indigenous wellness within their stories. The aim is to uncover themes that illustrate the range in possibilities of achieving wellness for those who are actively contributing to wellness in their community.

In the third phase, findings were reported to illuminate the myriad of contemporary opportunities to create or reclaim Indigenous wellness in the colonial, now-Canada context. The findings related to the wellness experts are explored first and this is followed by the findings

related to the role models. Finally, the theses within the two data sets are integrated into a model of Indigenous wellness.

Steps in Thematic Analysis

The five steps of thematic analysis are reviewed here, these include: developing a relationship with the data; generating initial coding; tentatively identifying themes within the codes; reviewing the identified themes; and consolidating and naming those themes. Finally, the researcher includes her analysis of the themes within the work.

Step one allows the researcher to enter into a *relationship with the data*. This means that the researcher familiarizes herself with and becomes better acquainted with the data. As a researcher, I became intimately familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the sources, and listening and re-listening to audio transcripts, memos, and any other data forms. In this way, I honoured the story shared.

The second phase is *initial code generation*. Code generation is a way to summarize the data and attach a brief label to a portion of data. This represents a summary of a portion of data that is potentially related to the research question. Codes are the labels that capture latent interpretations and descriptive meaning within the data. With this research, to generate the codes, I drew data from the interviews to summarize and, while keeping in mind the relationship to the research question, the relationship of the participant to their relations and teachings, and my relationship with the participants, I created summary transparent and defensible briefs, with memos and analysis notes capturing my relationship with the data and themes (Thomas, 2006). The summary briefs were translated into the condensed codes, which took the “extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format … to establish clear links between the research

objectives and the summary findings" (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). I used the approach put forward by Braun and Clarke (2006):

> There are a number of ways of actually coding extracts. If coding manually, you can code your data by writing notes on the texts you're analyzing, by using highlighters or coloured pens to indicate potential patterns, or by using Post-It notes to identify segments of data. You may initially identify the codes and then match them up with data extracts that demonstrate that code, but it is important in this phase to ensure that all actual data extracts are coded, and then collated together within each code. This may involve copying extracts of data from individual transcripts (p. 18).

The summaries supported code generation. This phase of the analysis process took place separately for both the wellness experts and wellness exemplars.

The third phase is an *inquiry for themes*. A theme, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (p. 82). Within this phase, it is made transparent that the themes are not objective. Themes are not preconstructed meanings situated within the data waiting to be uncovered; there is an active construction of themes in a relational context. Narrative inquiry rooted in Indigenous research methodology a process that includes active engagement of the research process, the researcher, and participants and their relations. From this perspective, themes emerge as the researcher and participants engage in a relational exchange and together co-generate meanings that are reflected and represented by the themes that emerge. This phase requires some creative mapping to organize and sort through the codes and combine them into clusters of potential themes that relate to the research question.

The fourth step is to review all the potential themes and codes in relation to the data. In this step, the researcher goes over everything, the entire data set, from both a birds-eye view and a close-up inspection, to ensure the complete picture is coherent, by identifying gaps, looking for inconsistencies, new surprising codes, and clusters or themes. Braun and Clarke (2014) suggest asking some key questions in this phase:

> Is this a theme? (It could be just a code).
>
> If it is a theme, what is the quality of this theme? (Does it tell me something useful about the data set and my research question?).
>
> What are the boundaries of this theme? (What does it include and exclude?).
>
> Are there enough (meaningful) data to support this theme? (Is the theme thin or thick?).
>
> Are the data too diverse and wide ranging? (Does the theme lack coherence?) (p. 56).

The fifth step is to *define and name the themes*. This process is analytical and forces the researcher to discern what the theme represents in relation to the research question. This phase also requires the researcher to provide evidence that represents a compelling example that demonstrates how the data are exemplifying that specific theme. Within this phase, it is also imperative to provide context, so there is contextual meaning from the data that tells the story.

The final step is to *produce the report*. While this step appears at the end of the systematic process, this placement is misleading. In this research, the report is a living document that is engaged throughout the entirety of the process. The final report tells a narrative and compelling story based on the data and analysis and directly responds to the research objectives and questions.

Participants

The research included two groups of participants. Group one includes the wellness experts who provided the vision of Indigenous wellness that would guide the research process. Group two, the wellness role models, were identified because they embodied aspects of Indigenous wellness.

Group One: Wellness Experts

Wellness experts are individuals who are professional acquaintances with whom I have worked intermittently in various wellness-promoting roles. A knowledge holder is not defined by age but by the role they play in the community. They are pro-social because they live a life guided by the Wisdom they carry. Traditionally, one of the foundational roles that knowledge holders played was defining, promoting, supporting, and engaging community wellness. Some knowledge holders still play this role in traditional terms, but so do individuals selected and hired to fulfil this role in community wellness programs. While the Indigenous wellness experts are not traditional knowledge holders, they occupy this strand of the role in the contemporary context and may well be knowledge holders-in-training. I trusted the wellness experts who hold this aspect of the role of a knowledge holder to guide me in exploring Indigenous wellness. The wellness experts know what it looks like for Indigenous wellness to be lived, so they act as cultural translators and informants of Indigenous wellness Wisdom and identify those who they witness living in wellness in the community.

Group Two: Role Models

The role models in this research comprised Indigenous adults over the age of 18 who were identified as living specific strands of Indigenous wellness that were articulated and

contextualized by the wellness experts. All were active contributors to wellness in their community in formal and informal roles. These included therapists, addictions workers, Spiritual-cultural healing facilitators, and Elders. In every case, they were engaged with other Indigenous relations in ways that promoted wellness in those around them.

Recruitment

The following section describes the recruitment process of the two groups of participants and the ways in which they were chosen to participate in the research.

Recruitment of Wellness Experts

The wellness experts in this research were Indigenous peers with whom I have been in relationship for decades. For many years, I have been informally building a social network of Indigenous individuals who are respected and contribute to wellness; they strive in their own lives for healing and wellness. The wellness experts were recruited through their engagement in existing professional wellness role relations. Witnessing their work and how they walk in the world, I feel that they are people I respect. I suspect they agreed to participate because of the trust they had in me to engage in a good way and the respect they have for my approach to the work and my intentions. Our relationships are based on our mutual respect and shared passion to contribute to Indigenous wellness.

Recruitment of Wellness Role Models

During the research interviews, the wellness experts were invited to nominate wellness role models—Indigenous adults recognized as embodying qualities of Indigenous wellness in the way that they live. The wellness experts agreed to think about who came to their minds, and stated that they would be willing to speak to them and ask their consent for me to contact them

for the purposes of this research. The connection was described as an opportunity to contribute by allowing us to learn from them about how they are living Indigenous wellness, for the benefit of other Indigenous people. Each wellness expert provided the wellness role model's contact information and verbal consent. I reached out to each by their respective preferred contact method to make an introduction, review the research overview and consent, and schedule an interview.

Summary

Within Chapter Three, I have offered an extensive overview of the research design, including a description of the thematic analysis used in the work. I have detailed the participant recruitment and selection process and the ethics followed in the course of the work, with specific reference to the guidance of Canada's tri-council ethics policies when working with Indigenous peoples.

The following chapter is one of two that examines the overall results of the data, opening with context for the reader in regard to the models used, the study participants, and the data derived from the interviews. Chapter Four considers the results of the data arising from interviews with wellness experts.

Chapter Four: Wellness Experts Results

This chapter focuses on the research results of the data provided by wellness experts. It begins with an introduction to the participants involved in this portion of the research. It then offers some context for the reader, to introduce the proposed Indigenous healing model for wellness. In Chapter 4, I demonstrate how interview excerpts were selected to support the various phases, domains, and themes incorporated in the work. Next, the chapter goes on to make explicit the conscious creation of titles and names for the themes, which is an act of resistance to colonization by me, as an Indigenous researcher. With the context established, the reader is provided with a broad introduction to the model and the results from a bird's-eye view.

The foundation is set for the reader to move into the details of each of the three phases of the model that are supported by domains and themes, with excerpts from the interviews to serve as examples. In this exploratory study, the phases and domains were consistent across all participants. However, the themes demonstrate unique stories and expressions of the different people's experiences, and the importance of documenting these stories is that they highlight how creative, ingenious, and determined people are in pursuing healing and reclaiming Indigenous wellness. Documenting these examples in such detail is intentional and is meant to serve as inspiration for the vast potential for healing and reclaiming wellness in diverse life contexts.

Below, the wellness experts are introduced with brief, anonymized, personal details, which supports the reader in coming into relationship with each of the participants.
This section then outlines the personal experiences of those participants who are wellness experts. I continue by providing some context for reading the results of this inquiry, and then articulate the three healing phases uncovered by thematic analysis, supported by the participants'

stories. This chapter section on the wellness experts illustrates a pattern of discontinuation of problematic substance use by the participants.

Introduction of Wellness Expert Participants

The following section introduces the wellness expert participants. As outlined earlier, I have replaced the participants' names with an initial to preserve their anonymity.

Participant J

J has Dene, Cree, and Métis heritage from a small community in the Northwest Territories, and has lived in other smaller communities in the North. J came to work in the Indigenous wellness field by way of her own healing, alongside pursuing education, where she was able to learn about the true history of colonization and its impacts on Indigenous people. J pursued her BSW and then moved to complete a Master's degree in social work. Throughout her career, J has worked as an alcohol and drug (A & D) counsellor and served as an instructor for various Indigenous organizations. She then worked in private practice, providing Indigenous clinical counselling, and serving other Indigenous Nations. J currently resides in the lower mainland and works full-time, supporting Indigenous healing and wellness. J is a 69-year-old mother of two adult children and grandmother of three grandchildren, which she sees as her most important role today.

Participant M

M is 32 years old, is a member of a First Nations community in Northern Saskatchewan, currently lives in British Columbia, and is employed as a cultural worker. M has been a member of an Indigenous society for the past five years. M was introduced into Indigenous culture and ceremony through his own healing from "addictions" six years ago, while in residential

treatment, and he has vigorously pursued culture as healing and reclamation of wellness ever since. Participant M is a son, partner, brother, grandchild, ceremonial leader, and entrepreneur.

Participant R

R is 46 years old, and a member and the director of health and wellness for an Indian band. R has worked within a health department for over 20 years, attaining the role of director. She is an Indigenous language speaker and completed two years of university through Simon Fraser University in the language proficiency program. Participant R is a mother, daughter, wife, auntie, granddaughter, and cultural advocate. She enjoys hand drumming and singing. She offers cultural support as needed and requested. She believes that a good part of our ways of knowing is embedded in language, as the language is tied to the land.

Participant S

S is an Elder. Her traditional name means "woman who speaks with the turtle," a Cree name given by her traditional mother. S is 64 years old and was born in Moose Factory, Ontario, in a tuberculosis sanitorium. S has worked in the field of health for 45 years, much of that time in a professional capacity with First Nations. She attained a high level of education. S described her entire life journey on Mother Earth as being in pursuit of wellness and enlightenment that comes from within. S is a mother to six adult children, a grandmother, and auntie to many.

Participant D

D is a member of a First Nation on the west coast and is the executive director of a health access centre, servicing seven Anishinaabeg communities and off-reserve, Inuit, and Métis in Ontario. D has worked in Indigenous wellness her whole life; she is 50 years old and began her career as a health inspector on reserve. She completed a Master's degree at the University of

Waterloo and has worked in Indigenous health and wellness leadership and management ever since. D is the mother of three, a wife, daughter, auntie, cousin, and sister.

Participant A

A is Ktunaxa and Kaska Dene. She is a member of a First Nation. Participant A lived in Ktunaxa territory until she moved to Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh lands to pursue a Master's degree in social work (MSW). She has lived in this area since working in an Indigenous health centre in the Downtown Eastside. A is 29 years old and has worked in healing, wellness, and social services since she was 19 years old. She holds a Bachelor's degree in social work with a specialization in child welfare, and her MSW focused on clinical therapy with Indigenous individuals. A has drawn from her lived experience as a child in care who has subsequently become a caregiver, as a person in recovery from addiction and as a survivor of intimate partner violence, healing from and utilizing the Wisdom learned from these personal experiences to support others.

Participant L

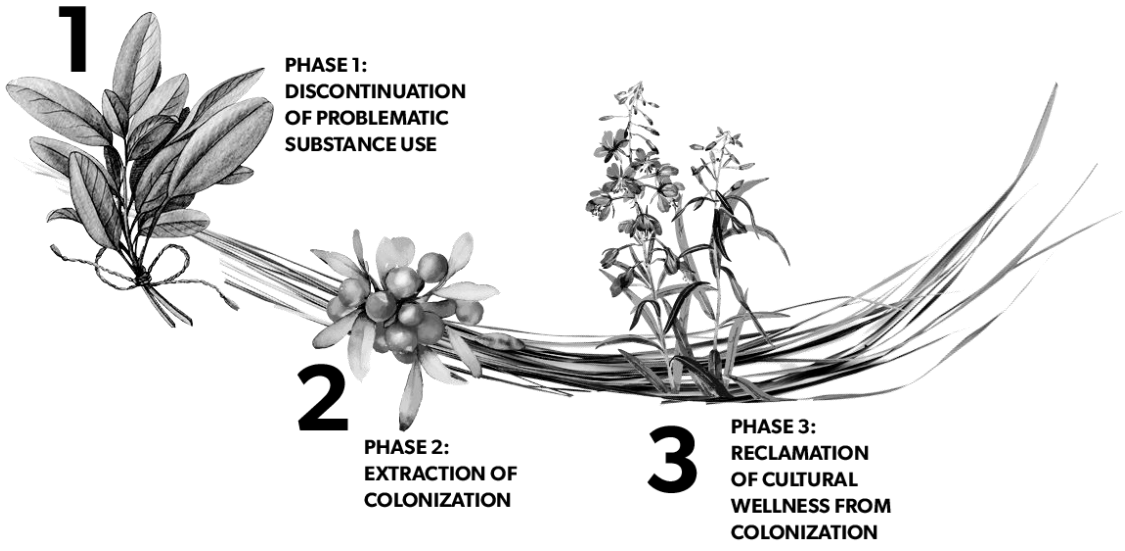
L is from a First Nation and he is 60 years old. He earned a Bachelor's degree in social work from Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in the 1990s. L is a husband, father, and grandfather to three children. He has worked his entire career with Indigenous people, first, for 15 years in the school district as an Indigenous education support worker, as a family support worker, and then, as an addictions worker for eight years for his community, and he served for six years as a councilman for his community.

Indigenous Healing Model for Wellness

Consistent across all the data was the presence of a process that pointed to wellness. The data are organized into three phases that together create a preliminary model that is indicative of the process of healing. The preliminary model that emerged leverages metaphors and literal descriptions for naming the phases, domains, and themes. The foremost consideration was to select names that captured and reflected the intention of the story while evoking a cognitive and somatic understanding of each of the phases for the reader.

Figure 6

Illustration of the Healing Phases of Wellness



Note. This model holds intentional significance, inclusive of the choice to present it in grey scale and the choice of the visuals to represent the phases. The reader will come to understand the significance of the various aspects of the model, as did I during the research. As the data and model was unveiled to me, I also unveil it to the reader.

Phase one, the *discontinuation of problematic substance use*, is the phase that serves as the catalyst that initiates the healing process. This phase has two domains, the title theme of the phase and the domain of *inherited discontinuation with problematic substances for coping*.

Phase two, *the extraction of colonization*, includes two major domains; the interpersonal and intrapersonal extractions of colonialism. Within the interpersonal domain, harmful relations are extracted. Within the intrapersonal domain are all the ways that colonization has become internalized. The themes in phase two include the colonial narrative, colonized Indigenous identity, colonial shame, colonial coping, colonial masculinity, colonized Indigenous culture, colonized language, and colonial values.

Phase three, *reclaiming cultural wellness from colonization,* encompasses a substantial data set which speaks to the amount of reclamation necessary for Indigenous people in healing. Cultural wellness—which supported Indigenous people to thrive prior to colonization—was stolen and needs to be reclaimed. The domains in this phase include efforts to reclaim culture, to reclaim relational wellness, and to reclaim personal wellness. Each of the domains has a number of themes, which are supported by examples. The diagram found below in Table 1 provides a broad outline of the three phases, alongside their domains and themes.

Table 1

Overview of Wellness Experts' Healing Process

Phases	Domains	Themes
Phase one: Discontinuation of problematic substance use	Inherited discontinuation with problematic substances	

	Interpersonal-harmful relations	
Phase two: Extraction of colonization	Intrapersonal-internalized colonization	Colonial narrative Colonized Indigenous identity Colonial shame Colonial coping Colonial masculinity Colonized Indigenous culture Colonized language Colonial values
	Reclaiming culture	Calls for the individual to: Reclaim history of colonialism Reclaim access to culture Reclaim inclusion in culture Reclaim culture's living process Reclaim cultural values
Phase three: Reclamation of cultural wellness from colonization	Reclaiming relational wellness	Calls for the individual to: Reclaim Indigenous belonging Reclaim Indigenous wellness contribution Reclaim Indigenous connection through shared colonial pain Reclaim wellness-promoting relations
	Reclaiming personal wellness	Calls for the individual to: Reclaim Indigenous identity Reclaim social wellness Reclaim emotional wellness Reclaim mental wellness Reclaim spiritual wellness Reclaim physical wellness

Helpful Context for Reading the Results

The research was an exploratory study, wherein all the participants' Wisdom offerings were honoured. The thematic analysis revealed three healing phases, and, in the case of the wellness experts, an additional fourth phase; living in the pursuit of wellness. Each phase is

presented with the relevant embedded domains, then the themes associated with each domain, with supporting examples of healing and wellness. Some phases, such as phase one, have, in the first two levels, a phase, domain, and theme. The first three healing phases, as illustrated in Table 1, were represented by the experience of all the expert participants. Each phase was presented with commentary from each participant, illustrating the defining domains of each phase. All of the directly relevant and related comments attached to each theme are supported with examples. In terms of the themes, the model is generated through an exploratory, not a comparative, narrative study. Therefore, it is not concerned with how many people provided evidence for a theme but, rather, the range of illustrative themes illuminates the possible range and quality of a phase in the framework. To interpret the data, the narratives are illustrated as holistic quotes. Therefore, the data are inclusive and often integrated with language and themes that speak to more than one narrative.

Wellness Themes

The data were coded to a given theme identified by the participant, and other, secondary wellness themes in the same quotation were deprioritized and not emphasized. For example, a participant might have stated that, in relation to the wellness theme of *physical health*, they go into nature for walks, which is a way to connect to Spirit and one's relations; they find grounding and mindfulness in this experience, too. While there is a focus that covers the themes of *nature* and *mental health*, the data would be categorized as *physical*, because the primary intention or Spirit in which the participant engaged with the activity was for physical purposes, even though they received other benefits.

The hierarchy of the organization of the model is as follows; it begins with phases, followed by embedded themes, and then, wellness examples to illustrate the themes. Not all phases include all the hierarchies of data; if they do not, those were simply left out, and the respective relevant hierarchies are displayed.

Radical Resistance to Carrying Blame/Shame for the Impacts of Colonization

Throughout this work, I have strategically used language as an act of resistance to common outcomes of colonization that are regularly tethered to Indigenous people—as if those outcomes are *their* issue, with no context indicating that their so-called "issue" is a predictable and strategic outcome of colonization. This is the case, for example, with the phase, *the extraction of colonization*.

Colonization has been poisoning Indigenous people for generations and a natural and unavoidable consequence is internalized colonization. I was conscious of this and careful not to put the burden of ownership of the challenges and impacts of colonization onto Indigenous people, further entrenching internalized colonization, when they, in fact, are the victims of colonial trauma. I named the extractions of colonization—which commonly are labeled *Indigenous*, but which are quite obviously the result of the history of colonization—as *colonial extractions*. For example, where study participants reported having struggled with removing or extracting a sense of shame, I intentionally identified it as *colonial shame* instead of *Indigenous shame*. When I spoke of trauma, I named it *colonial trauma*, not *Indigenous trauma*.

Colonization is the context that created the trauma. It needs to be held responsible and not be allowed to make this an Indigenous problem; it is a colonial problem. The required healing is

a necessity for the extraction of colonization from an Indigenous person, so they can heal and be liberated to strive for wellness.

Personal Positionality

I embarked on this research with the intention of understanding wellness as an abstract concept that could be defined, but, unexpectedly, a process with phases and descriptive examples emerged to demonstrate the intricate and complex nature of each phase. Despite my intentions to understand what Indigenous wellness was, as a single, definable, abstract concept, the research revealed a complex process. I had strategically created two interview participant groups with different selection criteria and interview questions. The first group, the wellness experts, are those who are experts in wellness; their life's work is focused on the Indigenous wellness field and leading Indigenous wellness within their various contexts. From this group, I had hoped to glean the concepts that would define Indigenous wellness. However, what emerged from the participants' reported experiences was not a definable concept of the outcome of Indigenous wellness, but, rather, an Indigenous healing process that takes into account the historical and current colonial context.

Commonly found in literature, and widely accepted socio-culturally, is the notion that Indigenous healing is situated within an "historical" healing of colonization (Brave Heart, 2003; Duran, 2006; Thira, 2009). There is wide recognition of historical colonial trauma healing, but this model illustrates the healing acquired from historical and ongoing, current colonization. This model accounts for the ongoing wounding of colonization and considers how to pragmatically heal within this current context. What emerged from the data was information about how Indigenous people were feeling in the early days of healing and in the even-earlier days of

understanding what living in wellness was within a contemporary colonial context and, in doing so, trying to re-create what Indigenous wellness was in pre-colonial times. As one interviewee revealed, “I am still piecing together what Indigenous wellness is; I think we are still learning that.”

The second group, the wellness role models, were those put forward by wellness experts and who, from their perspective, had demonstrated living Indigenous wellness. In regard to the wellness role models, I intended to understand the examples of how individuals were living in wellness, with the intention to begin identifying the emerging themes that supported the individual’s wellness. I initially had strong internal resistance and opposition to the fact that healing is still required. After all, have we not talked enough about healing? As I rolled my eyes, I thought of all the work I had read on healing. I come from a counselling psychology background, and I have spent my entire career, both working and educational, talking about healing. I thought, “When can we finally be done with healing and focus on thriving in wellness? Can’t we focus on the strengths and wellness and put aside healing?”

Looking back, I can see how my personal resistance, shame, and judgement clouded my understanding of healing and that, in fact, healing is strength and an important transformative piece of the process that cannot be skimmed over in fear and shame. I remember seeing a meme that read, “Silence is the root of shame.” I noticed my silence and avoidance of addressing healing in my life and in this paper. The not-talking-about-it is the shame. The avoidance of the necessity for healing was personal, and I see how it stems from the socio-cultural collective shame that has been projected onto Indigenous people for their colonial wounds. It is a fitting example of internalized colonization. What the participants confronted and voiced clearly—so

much so, in fact, that I could not deny it—was that healing is imperative, and, furthermore, to be celebrated. Healing is an act of resistance to colonization and takes immense strength. There is a place for healing; it is part of the continuum of wellness, and it is in alignment with the strength-based perspective. Talking about healing is not a weakness.

The data revealed that healing is required for all Indigenous people, a truth I disdained until the data convinced me otherwise, and, since then, I embarked on my own healing journey. The data from both participant groups revealed themes illuminating the healing process, with the final stage being Indigenous wellness as the outcome that was demonstrated by the wellness role models. The participants illustrated the myriad contributors to Indigenous wellness and demonstrated that wellness is not an end state; it is consistent engagement with a moment-by-moment awareness of striving for wellness that is continually being created and recreated by individuals on a regular basis.

The healing phases that emerged from the wellness experts were as follows; phase one, the discontinuation of problematic substances, phase two, the extraction of colonization, and phase three, the reclamation of cultural wellness from colonization. The first phase was described as a self-motivated intervention to stop engaging with harmful substances—a habit initiated by the person themselves or inherited from the previous generation. The second phase involved the removal and purging of the effects of colonization from an Indigenous person. The word *extraction* was chosen because it was apparent that there was a removal and pulling out of colonization from the person. I considered the word *death*, but found that that was not appropriate because death alluded to the idea that colonization could die. In this contemporary

context, colonization never dies, and Indigenous people find ways to heal the initial colonial wounds and then care for ongoing wounds in ongoing healing work as they strive for wellness.

The third phase, *reclamation of cultural wellness from colonization*, was the reclaiming of the things the individual missed out on and that were stolen from them; it was the active pursuit to reclaim what should have been inherent in life for wellness.

Phase One: Discontinuation of Problematic Substance Use

An examination of the data uncovered the first phase in contemporary Indigenous healing as the action of one person within the generation who chooses to discontinue problematic and harmful substance use. It was surprising to see this initial phase emerge as the catalyst for healing and wellness. This disengagement was necessary as a full stop in using substances as a way of coping with colonial trauma that had horrific consequences in people's lives, while also serving as a barrier to healing and wellness. Participants explained the choice to take this action—what was expressed as an immense and significant, trajectory-changing action, by the participant or participant's family—as the turning point, or the breaking of the cycle. This phase is initiated by the one person within the generation who stops using substances; it appears to be abrupt and an act of resistance, recognizing that this pattern must be stopped. And so, it is. As Participant M declared:

> I reached a place of rock bottom; I was struggling with addiction and cycles of violence in my community. I participated actively and was a victim. I had a lack of positive role models. I didn't feel connected to peers and my community. I was so emotionally immature. The process, for me, took a few months of compounding different events; it was a long time coming, and the thing that caused me to change was I got a real fear in

> me for death or imprisonment. I drank and did a lot of drugs to ease the anxiety, but it just got to be too much.

Participant A's experience illustrated a similar pattern:

> My dad still hasn't connected. He used to, but he doesn't anymore and doesn't connect with me anymore either. So, that was active colonization and active—All of that was working because there's three generations that were fragmented. But then, coming here, I was able to find a connection, and I was able to skip the middle generation, [Dad's], because he's not ready; he is living in his trauma, and there is no judgement. That's where he's at in the world. But I can't wait for him, and it was hurting me because that was impeding me. I was suffering. Drinking was a problem in my life before, too. I was going down a bad path. But I made the change, took a different path, confronted healing, went to school.

Participant L's narrative displayed a striking similarity of disengagement with substance use as the entry point into healing. L explained:

> It all started when I had my first son, soon after he was born. I was living a bad lifestyle and a lot of drinking, and I was on the radar of social workers. I didn't want my son in foster care, as I was raised. It got to a point where the social worker and MCFD were watching and concerned. So, when they came and talked to me, others came and talked to me, too. They said if I was to be responsible, I had to stop. I didn't know about being an alcoholic or being a good parent; I never was shown that. I tried to be sober, and it would last three days. Then I heard the 20 questions, you know, from AA [Alcoholics Anonymous]. It was an accident. Actually, there was someone doing a youth workshop

> with the kids, and I went to set up a table and chairs as a side job. I was in the background, eating, and the facilitator asked the 20 questions. It's an assessment of alcohol use, it's from AA. I just did it in my head, as I was in the background. I had 18 out of 20. I thought that was a good thing. Then I heard the facilitator say, if you have four or more, you have issues with chronic alcoholism, and I had 18! Then I went home that night, and I went back early in the morning, and I started talking to the facilitator. She encouraged me to connect with [*unnamed*] and [*unnamed*]. [*Unnamed*] became my alcohol and drug worker, and then, after a while, I became the youth worker and worked with him.

Inherited Discontinuation with Problematic Substances for Coping

The participants revealed the gift of inherited discontinued substance use, which is another entry point into healing and wellness, from a previous generation. These participants acknowledged that their Ancestors intervened and disrupted the generation cycle of substance use for colonial coping; therefore, they did not have to, but that did not mean they were exempt from the rest of the healing process to move into wellness. Participant D reflects this disruption:

> I think a lot of learning to live in wellness, for me, comes from strong parenting, great parents, right? My mom had trauma herself, went to residential school, went to residential and day school, had an abusive father and alcoholic parents [who] were abusive. So, when she ventured out on her own at 18, she made a decision that she's not going to do the same. She made a conscious decision not to raise her family, when she had them, the same way that she was raised. She made that decision. And my dad, when he came into the picture, same thing. He came from a very large family. Like, he's non-Indigenous,

> very Catholic, very poor. There was a lot of struggles in their family. And he also said the same thing. They both made the commitment to raising children differently. So, I had very solid role models—And so, if I could go back to saying what wellness is, too, [it] is having a strong family, like, having a strong and balanced family. So, I think that's where, for myself, I trace it back to my parenting. They gave me good, solid parenting.

Participant R, similarly, emphasized the importance of the people in her life, in her disruption of the pattern of colonial coping with substances:

> My mom. My mom and my auntie. So, what I have learned and what I do for my health is because of my mom and auntie. My mom stopped drinking; I grew up with a strong parent. My mom was like, "That's it. No more for me. I have my children," and she stopped. Then she got us into learning how to powwow dance, fancy dance or traditional, junior girls traditional dance, whatever it was. Then we went to powwow a lot, and there were a lot of teachings there, too. It's like a lot of teachings of how to carry yourself and even respecting your regalia.

The first pattern that emerged from the wellness experts is the discontinuation of problematic substance use by the participants themselves or their having inherited it from the previous generation.

Phase Two: Extraction of Colonization

The second pattern that was illuminated by the data was the subsequent phase of extracting colonization from one's life and self. An interesting pattern that emerged with these participants involved the intrapersonal and interpersonal extractions of colonization. All of the extractions, except for one, were intrapersonal; colonization was largely internalized, and the

extractions occurred within the individual, except with their relations. Removing colonization is largely internal work, that is, changing oneself and removing one's self from others who are causing harm and impeding the person from being able to heal and realize wellness.

Interestingly, all of the extractions explored here are associated with predictable impacts of colonial strategies and trauma that naturally become internalized. As mentioned, two categories emerged with the wellness experts; 1) the interpersonal and 2) the intrapersonal. Within the interpersonal, harmful relations are extracted. Within the intrapersonal, which is characterized by internalized colonization, the extractions included the removal of colonized Indigenous culture, colonized language, colonial values, colonial narrative, colonized Indigenous identity, colonial shame, colonial coping, and colonial masculinity.

Removing Interpersonal-Harmful Relations

The participants found it necessary to extract harmful relationships from their lives. While they reflected that it is a challenge to remove harmful people from one's life, they often noted this with understanding and compassion. The participants often specifically identified the context of colonial trauma as the root of the harmful behaviours. They saw these relations as harmful because they projected unhealed colonial trauma. As Participant J articulated:

> Many people around us all have their own [colonial] trauma, and, when it is not healed, it causes harm to us … I think many people I know, anyway, have a hard time noticing that they need to work on walking away from people causing harm. I see people reacting with anger because they are exposed to and taking on other people's pain, and it is hurtful to them and then to others whom they interact with. I've been trying to walk through a

> couple of scenarios with my family, which is, basically, I need to put boundaries in place to protect myself, or we absorb their violence.

Participant A shared a similar scenario of separating from harmful relations, which means distancing from the individuals who are supposed to provide care and love, and accepting that their behaviour is harmful. Participant A explained that her father suffers from colonial trauma and behaves in a colonized way; he was a child of the Sixties Scoop, was separated from his family, grew up under the control of a government ministry, and had experienced his own life of traumas. Participant A shared the following; "I know I'm never going to be able to make [Dad] be ready [for healing]. I just have to love him while maintaining separation. Let him float around and do what he's doing, whether I agree with it or not. Having any other feelings about it doesn't help. He is not in my life."

Extracting Intrapersonal-Internalized Colonization

The participants highlighted the profuse and perverse ways in which internalized oppression was absorbed and must be extracted, a necessary phase in healing to move toward wellness. The removal of internalized oppression is the challenging, messy, and intricate work of untangling and separating colonization from one's self. It is essential and liberating for the individual to externalize and extract colonial poison. Participant J exemplified this:

> I came to work in the field, the wellness field, through my own healing. It was really through my own healing, but mostly a lot of my education that I was really able to learn about colonization and what really happened to Indigenous people because we didn't talk about that in my communities or family; it is not talked at all by anyone. And if it is, it's not the truth. Right? So, I absorbed all of that growing up; it was just sort of internalized

> oppression. I used many strategies, like, I really tried to avoid being Native; if we could pass, we would, and I could pass, and some of my other family members passed better than others, so, pretending to be White because it was safer than way. I was very strategic around who to admit that I was Indigenous to. Right? And then, there was other people who kind of knew, and they said, "Yeah. Well, you're an Indian, aren't you?" Yeah. So anyways, that's kind of how I grew up. So, to me, this whole thing around wellness is really about that for me, coming to a place of being okay with who I am as an Indigenous woman.

Unweaving Colonized Indigenous Culture

The participants outlined the necessary work to be done to untangle wellness-promoting Indigenous culture and colonized Indigenous culture. Participant J explained the complexity of unweaving colonization from Indigenous culture. J differentiated Indigenous culture—which is rooted in Indigenous values—from Western colonized Indigenous culture, by evaluating whether it will promote or diminish personal and relational healing and wellness. Indigenous culture and values will always promote personal and relational wellness, whereas poisoned Indigenous culture will promote harm.

Unlearning Colonized Language

Colonized Indigenous language is Indigenous language that is interpreted and translated from a Western colonial lens. This poisons the Indigenous language and, therefore, the culture and worldview. Participant S shared that she cautions others when learning the language because there is an inherent risk, as a result of colonization, that must be purged from the Indigenous language:

> I think that, if we were to pursue our language—Okay, we have to be careful with it, though, because we can't pursue our language in the English way … For example, I listen to Star teachings from [*unnamed*] and [*unnamed*]. They're Cree elders from out East. And he told us the other day that someone asked him to talk about the bear. He says, in the Cree language, we say "bear." And it derives from [*Indigenous language spoken*], which means literally [inaudible]. He said, "You have to be careful. When you learn the language, learn the literal meaning." So, the literal meaning, where [*Indigenous language spoken*] came from, was [*Indigenous language spoken*], which means that this being is Medicine. So, when you look at it like that, it opens up a whole realm when you think about a bear. This is not just a bear. You go to the zoo; oh, there's a bear, right? But when you think of it that way, this being is Medicine, holy smokes. That's, like, huge … And, if you use Medicine from a bear, this isn't just bear Medicine. This is a being that is Medicine. So that you realize how powerful that Medicine is. So, that's why I love the language so much, because, when you learn it that way—I don't like learning it the other way. I can't learn it, and I don't like learning it. But when I get these little tidbits, I just love it, as it helps me with knowing who I am.

Separating from Colonial Values

The data illuminated the conscious and deliberate effort of participants to separate from colonial values that are incongruent with living in wellness. Participant M explained that to be well is aligned with pre-colonial values. In pre-colonial stories, if individuals embodied Western values—for example, independence and resource accumulation—the story was designed as a warning to teach that living with those values results in terrible outcomes for that person. M

advocated for the notion that, in this contemporary life, Indigenous people can be well if they devalue Western values:

> Back in the day, not everyone was well; not every person adopted the hunter-gatherer, egalitarian mindset of equanimity, healthy power, gathering resources, and acting selflessly. They had personal aspirations of power over other people and materialistic things, but in the stories we hear, it did not end up well for them. I think that people who want to live like that, in an independent way, with everything for themselves, [following] the values of capitalism, what capitalism is, and the ability to work hard, have a lot of things. A certain amount of satisfaction is gained from that, but I don't think you would ever feel totally well. You need a sense of community. Humans are social creators. It is lonely at the top.

For Participant S, valuing money and materialism are examples of Western colonialization and should be purged; "Money is part of the White man's world, and so, it's going to go along with the White man's thinking and the White man's views of success. But, as Native people, I don't think we should measure ourselves that way. We need to get rid of that way of thinking."

Extricating Oneself from Colonized Indigenous Identity

Extracting colonized Indigenous identity from oneself means releasing the shame-based internalized Indigenous identity, the wide-spread societal belief that Indigenous people are morally less in every way. Participant J asserted that she has come to understand that she internalized racism and oppression in her life from being Indigenous and mixed-blood.

Similarly, Participant A expressed her hate and disgust as she came to realize the true harms and impacts of colonization that were contrary to what she was raised to believe. Extracting the colonial narrative, which becomes absorbed throughout one's life and becomes internalized, is necessary, she stated:

> Indigenous people start behind everyone, very wounded … We have to get there [to Indigenous wellness]. But also recognizing that we're wounded, not because of ourselves or our families. It's the government. I learned about the truths. When I first learned, it is so disturbing. But still, that drove me to really learn what has happened and how I believed it. I hate the government. So, it's the government, combined with the churches, combined with society, that upholds colonization. So, we need to be aware of that and get the ideas we are told, growing up, out of our minds before we even look at Indigenous wellness.

Extracting Colonial Shame

Data analysis revealed that the participants carried colonial shame that had to be extracted. Colonial shame is learned by existing in a sociocultural colonial context that infuses Indigenous hate into one's entire being. Participant L shared that notion, after he learned about colonial shame and realized that he had been taught to hate himself:

> I had so much shame and hate; it stemmed from childhood and being in foster care and being Indian. It led me to a place of suicidal thoughts. I was very miserable, very lonely. I didn't love myself. I was really angry at the way I lived. Even though I had 16 years of sobriety, no drugs, no alcohol, I had a really good job, but I ended up by myself. You

> have to learn that we [Indigenous people] learned to hate ourselves, and that isn't true; I had to get rid of that belief, and once we see that, you can learn to love yourself.

A second layer of colonial shame was also exposed. *Colonial shame* is the first deep soul wound that one must overcome; a hatred for oneself. The second layer compounds the initial wound. This secondary shame is cast onto Indigenous people for the ways that Indigenous people cope and survive because of the initial wound of colonial shame, in an iterative, shame-wounding process. Indigenous individuals are poisoned with colonial shame from sociocultural experiences, from birth, and then, to cope with the shame, they engage in stigmatized strategies such as "addiction," which further ostracizes and shames them. Participant A named the second layer of shame cast onto Indigenous people, which comprises judgement and blame, for acting in so-called "bad" or "unacceptable ways", in response to the initial colonial-based shaming:

> I constantly am reminding [Indigenous] people that there's no blame or shame in whatever you need to do to get through your life to cope. And I mean that on every single level, on every single level. I have no judgements about substance use. I have no judgements for things like sex work. I have no judgements for things like even running away and fleeing anywhere. I just tell my people—I've had people tell me that they're about to go MIA and be—I'm like, "Okay. I would like to know that you're alive, but you don't owe me anything. I will not judge. I'm going to be here when you're ready to come back." I'm like, "No judgements, no questions asked." And, if there are, it's genuinely for your well-being and your aliveness; their lives matter, and you have to see their goodness. Judging them for responding to trauma just adds salt to the wounds, making any chance of healing even further away.

Removing Colonial Coping

Participants' data revealed that they disengaged with colonial coping, which is to abstain from the coping strategies that the person has used for surviving historical and ongoing colonial trauma. Colonial coping includes a wide range of behaviours, like problematic substance use, self-abandonment, self-repression, and people-pleasing, all of which promote harm to self and one's relations.

Participant L illustrated how he removed colonial coping, which, for him, meant removing problematic substance use, alcohol, and drugs from his life so he could engage in personal healing and wellness:

> I had to grow up once I quit drinking and, once I quit doing the drugs and everything, I had to grow up mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. Because when I started doing drugs and everything else, I was eleven years old. Right? I started living that lifestyle, and I stopped growing that way. Right? And, once I started, I liked the feeling. It gave me the way to escape because I was [not proud] of my background and who I was as an Indigenous person. I was ashamed of who I was, and I didn't know who I was as Secwepemc. And, with the drugs and the alcohol, it empowered me. It gave me this kind of macho image. It was my escape from the pain and the shame. It was my Medicine. It kept me alive. But [for me] to live, it had to stop.

Participant A offered her experience of witnessing Indigenous people using substances for colonial coping. Like her clients, she described abandoning herself to serve others. She recognizes that colonial coping needs to stop for healing to start. Participant A shared that Indigenous children learn to meet other people's needs instead of their own as a survival

mechanism, but this tendency is harmful when the child becomes an adult. A noted that she struggled similarly as a child growing up in foster care but has worked on purging that tendency:

> I literally give [clients] the advice I give myself. And it's like, "You need to focus on you. You need to focus on you." I've got people who are Downtown Eastside warriors, will take care of everybody's kids, will take care of all the women, will take care of all the young men that are getting into the gangs and stuff. They are taking care of everybody. And they're just medicating all day, every day, and they're lucky they haven't overdosed and things like that. And they come to me, and they're so bubbly and so happy, and just—you can tell it doesn't fulfill them. But they've put themselves on the back burner. Actually, they've taken themselves off of the burner completely. And that's their coping.
>
> That's them, as a child, when they were in the service of their caregiver, where they were validated and got what they needed, when they were in service to their caregivers. So now, their existence is literally trying to meet their caregiver's needs, so they don't consider their own needs. They have pushed down listening to their own needs. And that was me. That was literally so me. So, it's taken me a lot to learn that. And that's really what it is. And that's the trauma, as a child of the "care" system.

Eradication of Colonial Masculinity

One participant directly addressed colonial masculinity as an impeding force that is required to be extracted in healing. Participants described colonial masculinity as the independent, masculine ego built on a sense of arrogance and "strength" that is synonymous with not feeling any emotions except along the spectrum of anger, indifference, entitlement, and superiority. Participant L noted:

I went to the AA meeting, sat myself down in the chair, and the guy that was chairing looked at me and he goes, “Do you want to start us off on this meeting?” And I just started sobbing and crying, and just—snot was rolling out. I just lost my stuff right in front of everybody, just had this major meltdown. And I was there for 20 minutes like that. Nobody told me to shut up. Nobody told me to get out of the room. Nobody said anything to me. They just let me be me at that moment. And I had no control. I was just sobbing. At first, I was like, “Why is this happening to me?” And I realized really quickly that I was surrendering. I was surrendering to my ‘isms’. My ‘isms’, that masculine aura we learn [from colonization] had taken control of me, and I became a real dry drunk. And I became righteous—I had really long, braided hair, and I really felt like I was a righteous person. I was tough, never felt anything, never cried, very stern. I was going to lead my people to the promised land.

When I had this major meltdown in front of a whole group of strangers, there were, like, at least 40 people, if not 50 people, in that room that were total strangers at AA. At first, it was really helpful, again, because I started realizing that it had the solutions, because I didn’t have the answers. I became egotistical. I was very righteous. And the way I was doing it led me to a place of suicidal thoughts. I was very miserable, very lonely. I didn’t love myself. I was really angry at the way I lived. Even though I had 16 years of sobriety, no drugs, no alcohol. I had a really good job, but I ended up by myself. I had to get rid of that ego.

Summary of Phase Two

Among all participants, there was one theme of the intrapersonal extraction of colonization with relations that were harmful; the rest of the extractions were all in relation to one's self, psyche, heart, and Spirit. Examples have been provided of the efforts made by the participants to extract and separate themselves from colonization, for themselves and their relations, as the second phase in healing to move toward wellness.

Phase Three: Reclaiming Cultural Wellness from Colonization

It was surprising to me that the first time that wellness was spoken about within the process was in the reclamation phase. The third phase that emerged from the data was the reclamation of cultural wellness. Participants were actively reclaiming what was stolen or poisoned by colonization. The participants highlighted the perspective that, prior to colonialization, Indigenous wellness was the norm. As Participant L observed, "Indigenous people thrived for millennia prior to 'settlers' coming." Indigenous wellness is unique and different from the colonial Western concepts of wellness. It was highlighted in the data that, in the contemporary colonial context, wellness is not the baseline start for most, if not all, Indigenous people because of historical and ongoing colonial trauma. Therefore, healing requires reclaiming wellness, involving Indigeneity, all one's relations, oneself, and Spirit. The participants asserted that reclaiming Indigenous wellness is a laborious pursuit and quest; it is reclaiming what colonization stole.

Participant L grew up experiencing colonial trauma; he did not know what wellness was nor how to achieve it. He shared with me that his life had been a pursuit of healing and seeking wellness and reconnection to Spirit; "When I look at Indigenous wellness today, like I said, it

starts with myself. And growing up, I didn't have—a wellness worldview at all. I grew up in foster care, and it was very confusing, and I had to learn how to have this Indigenous wellness view, this world view."

Reclaiming cultural wellness means making creative efforts to recreate and revitalize Indigeneity within a contemporary context, to connect with what is left of or known about Indigenous culture, while immersed in a contemporary colonial context with what appear to be scarce resources (i.e., role models, Elders, and access to culture). Participants were profoundly resourceful in reclaiming and recreating their Indigeneity and Indigenous culture, in beginning to live it and being guided by it on a daily basis. A surprising finding was the length and number of reclamations that were necessary to move toward wellness. Reclamations by the wellness experts were, by far, the longest phase of the process, with the most themes and examples arising. It was found within the data that the participants were reclaiming culture, relational wellness, and personal wellness, which was illustrated by elements of the Medicine Wheel; that is, mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical wellness.

Reclaiming Culture

The results revealed that reclaiming culture is essential to wellness. To reclaim culture requires reengagement. Culture is re-engaged through 1) reclaiming the history of colonialism, 2) reclaiming access to culture, 3) reclaiming inclusion in culture, 4) reclaiming culture's living process, and 5) reclaiming cultural values of balance, integrity, humility, simplicity, Indigenous success, and Indigenous wealth.

It was strongly suggested throughout the interviews that reclaiming culture is essential to healing and wellness, and it is a courageous and challenging pursuit. The participants shed light

on the struggle they faced with internalized colonization, which has predictably created tension and fear of culture.[1] Participant L shared an example of courageously engaging with culture. L's story demonstrates the wounds of internalized colonialization, and the fear and shame that he felt about engaging with Indigenous culture. This participant shared his feeling that overcoming his fear to engage with Indigenous culture was essential to reclaiming an aspect of himself for healing and wellness:

> When I went to Round Lake, I was given a drum when I was leaving there, and my Auntie Lisa came and talked to me about four days after I was out of treatment, and I showed her that I got a hand drum. And she told me, "Good, you have a cultural teacher." I said, "Auntie, I don't know anything about drumming or singing." She goes, "Good, nephew. You have lots to learn then. Anytime they call for drummers, hand drummers come out at an event, you just go out there." I was 25 years old, and I felt like a child going out there, like I shouldn't be there. At the very beginning, I didn't know how to keep a drumbeat, and I felt like an imposter. I didn't know any songs. I felt really paranoid and very stressed out every time I did it. But I kept doing it because I knew that when I was doing it, it was helping me. I felt the connection, and it woke me up.

Participant L's comment illustrates that reclaiming culture is no easy feat; it requires learning cultural practices with teachings, language, and values while being simultaneously embedded in and inseparable from the colonial context. Furthermore, the participants articulated the critical decolonizing lens they overlay on all the Wisdom they develop. There are two lenses

[1] Individuals may not feel "Indigenous" enough to engage with culture; they may carry a fear of doing it wrong, have a felt sense of imposter syndrome, or view it as an act of virtue signaling.

applied to cultural learning; one is the act of learning itself and one is a decolonizing lens to untangle aspects of the cultural teachings or the language that do not align with wellness-promoting values. In essence, one is actively reclaiming Indigenous culture while extracting the colonized strands that have become tangled within it. Participant S shared this thought:

> I mean, we're not like we used to be long ago, when we spoke our language; we lived on the land all the time. But I think any Native person can live in wellness because they can be in touch with the land and learn their language and culture. But also, always be aware, when you are learning, that it is from the Indigenous worldview. A lot of our culture and language has been influenced and changed to fit into the White man's view and world.

Reclaiming the History of Colonialism

The participants' commentaries included a call for the exposure of truths about colonialism; it was one of the first themes in the data in the reclamation phase, preceding *culture* in the reclamation phase. It appeared that there was a relationship between the participant's exposure to truths about colonialism and their capacity for healing—as truths were sought and reclaimed, they simultaneously healed. The findings suggest that, for culture to be revitalized, the holes and gaps in the historical truths about colonialism within the Indigenous and colonial narratives must be addressed. Reclaiming historical and contemporary truth means uncovering and learning the true accounts of colonization and Indigenous history—both historical and ongoing—and the detailed accounts of colonial violence and trauma that impact Indigenous people. Participants A and J spoke about the importance of unveiling not only the historical but also the ongoing colonial context in which Indigenous people live, while Participant L shared the importance of knowing Indigenous history in Canada. L explained:

> I'm working with the missing and murdered children. So, I asked the question—And I always thought we knew this, but we don't. When we talk about the truth of our history, we need to understand what happened for ourselves, our story, our healing, our culture. So, here I am, on Chief and Council, and I asked the question, "How many of our people went to residential school? Do we know the answer? Do we?" No. In my community, we don't know the answer.
>
> So, how many people were the very first people to ever walk into the residential school? So, who is the very first Secwepemc person who walked into that industrial school? Who was that, and what year was that? We don't know. So, we're good doing the research. The question is, how many of our survivors are still alive? How many are on reserve? How many are off reserve? We don't know. If we're going to really do the healing, how many grandchildren are there?
>
> Well, if we're going to really do the healing in our communities, we need to understand this is our cultural history. This is our cultural identity for each community. And so, to answer your question, I really believe that we have to understand ourselves first. And if we don't have the true facts around it all—So, for example, I'm a Sixties Scoop child, okay? How many of our Secwepemc people have gone into the Sixties Scoop? They don't have a clue.

Participant A expressed the importance of learning the truth of current colonization and the impacts on Indigenous wellness as part of healing:

> It helped me to learn about colonization. As I learned, I was more able to heal, too. I really think Indigenous wellness in today's world is awareness. For Indigenous wellness, it's necessary to be aware that colonization is not over and exactly what happened. You have to recognize that Indigenous wellness is not the same as the overall wellness other Canadians experience. The background of the country is White and White supremacy. We must recognize that we're wounded, and not because of ourselves, our families, or our communities; it is because of the government.

Participant J advocated for the reclamation of truth about colonialism, to teach and invest in Indigenous people. J asserted that they have the right to learn about colonization and racism. She argued that learning truth about colonialism is a right that is not prioritized for Indigenous people but is for non-Indigenous people in government and institutions, as in health authorities:

> There's so much emphasis now on race and racism in organizations, like the health authority, that I think that it is detracting from our real needs in the community to learn about racism, oppression, colonization, and trauma first, so we can be liberated; it should be a basic right. If racism happened in a hospital and the Indigenous person knew it was racism, they would speak up. But it happens and continues to happen because many Indigenous people don't know. Why do non-Indigenous people get to learn about us before our own people? So, I think it's a way of making people who want to be seen as being really empathetic or even as allies—really being allies, and allyship, and all of that—I think it's more about filling their needs than it is for our people. Right?
>
> And, even with the cultural safety, Shawna—and I think cultural safety is absolutely necessary, but again, it is about prioritizing non-Indigenous—that training and everything

> is needed. But, at the same time, with all of that money, these folks—again, the privileged—are getting more training. And what is really changing in the communities? Yes, for some of my clients—I see what's happening in the community, and I see what's happening with my clients, and their lives are not changing. There isn't more food on the table. There aren't more jobs. Nothing—I shouldn't say "nothing." There's some progress in the communities. There's still lots of poverty. There's still lots of addiction. There's still lots of suicide. There's still so much happening. But yet, all of this money is going, and these privileged people are walking around with all of this knowledge and talking, speaking this flowery language about us. Yet, nothing's changing in the communities. Take that freaking money and give it to the community, and teach every Indigenous person about colonization and racism; that's the foundation for healing.

Reclaiming Engagement with Culture

A paradox arose from the data; while every participant noted that culture is essential to healing and wellness, what also emerged were obstacles and scarcity of culture. As Participant A explained:

> [Indigenous people and culture] are so scarce. It feels like you just want to bring anybody in that's willing, regardless of their background and life. Because you're at least upholding it. And it's so important to let people connect to their culture in whatever way that they're able to in the moment.

The participants named the contemporary barriers Indigenous people faced in engaging and reclaiming culture, and they offered solutions. The first barrier is *access to culture*. The second is to *inclusion* in culture, which comprises barriers to access established by Indigenous people

themselves to restrict access for other Indigenous people (e.g., exclusionary criteria). Within the contemporary context, there is a tension between "traditions" and contemporary challenges that are born out of colonial trauma and that exclude the very people who require access to and inclusion in culture. The third obstacle that became evident was in *seeking culture*. Seeking culture is the desire of participants to reclaim culture but finding that they face contemporary barriers to access—not put there by Indigenous people, but as the outcome of the context in which they live, such as living away from their Indigenous Nation—and the subsequent efforts they have engaged in to bring culture into their lives.

Reclaiming Access to Culture

The participants' data highlights the fact that reclaiming access to culture means removing contemporary barriers to make engagement with culture accessible in unorthodox ways so that any Indigenous person could access it. Participants suggested that there are myriad barriers to accessing culture in a contemporary colonial context. Furthermore, participant commentary illustrated the notion that there are a limited number of people who hold cultural teachings and Wisdom. Participants expressed the feeling that, currently, access to people to learn from is limited and access to culture is a privilege. They stressed that it is necessary to improve access to Indigenous culture by reclamation.

Two participants in the group had access to Indigenous culture through social family relations; the rest of the participants relied on Indigenous cultural connections they had to seek out and forge through contemporary systems—often through contemporary colonial structures such as healing or treatment centers, through their employment, and through educational institutions. Wellness and cultural social capital seemed to expand as people healed and lived in

pursuit of wellness. Cultural opportunities increased, but, for those living trauma-determined lives, culture is more challenging, if not impossible, to access, not only because of internalized colonization but also because of exclusionary "cultural" protocols, lack of social capital, and lack of employment opportunities to enhance connection.

Participant L shared that he sought out cultural addiction treatment and went to an Aboriginal treatment center. This was a transformative immersive cultural experience, and it was one of the initiating factors in his reclaiming wellness:

> I did not have the culture growing up. Thank Creator for Round Lake, which was a step into culture. I went to treatment at Round Lake treatment center, and they have the statement cultures treatment. Well, as soon as I did that, I learned really quickly. I didn't know anything about culture, and I was way more open to the teachings of my cultural mentor. He taught me about the smudge. He taught me about the drum. Learning about the drum, for me, is like a cultural teacher in itself.

For many of the participants, their own Indigenous culture was not accessible. However, the data indicated that they might still reclaim wellness through innovative, resourceful efforts. Participant J shared that her ability to reclaim culture within a contemporary context required resourcefulness. She collects and integrates a combination of diverse Indigenous teachings, new age, and other spiritual traditions that contribute to wellness and Wise-teachings.[2] Participant J noted:

[2] Wise-teachings are teachings not distinct to a specific Indigenous culture or may not be Indigenous at all. Wise-teachings include other Spiritual traditions and New Age teachings that are gathered to promote one's wellness. What makes them Wise is that they support Indigenous wellness.

> I collect teachings from many cultures. It's been a lifelong endeavour for me to collect what I can from where I can. I'm not even sure about this one teaching—Many teachings have roots in many cultures. I also have some Buddhist teachings that help me, and things that feel like they align with our culture.

Reclaiming Inclusion in Culture

The need for *reclamation of inclusion in culture* became evident from the data; this means that all Indigenous people have the right to be included in culture. Adaption is required to remove or shift common exclusionary criteria, such as the requirement to not use substances to participate in culture. All participants spoke about the importance of culture for healing and wellness. However, participants directly noted the barriers and the harm of exclusion from culture, as well as the importance of non-discrimination when it comes to the inclusivity of culture. Furthermore, as affirmed by Participant A, access to culture is every Indigenous person's right. Traditionally and historically, there have been exclusion criteria, but. in a contemporary colonial context, adaption is required; every Indigenous person should be welcomed and invited to partake in culture. Often, individuals are judged and excluded for how they cope with the wounds of colonization. Participant A shared:

> That's what I think Indigenous wellness is; combining the old ways, knowing that they're not going to work, and finding a way that it does work for people. We cannot keep operating based on the old "traditional" judgement. Something I've learned here that I know is a thing at home is people can't be part of a ceremony when using anything [like substances]. First of all, way more people are doing drugs than we're aware of. They're just being sneaky about it. And what drugs are we talking about here? Prescribed ones? Is

> that okay? Because they're from a Western culture, are they okay? Let's be honest—it's the same thing. It's so exclusionary. But, at home, it's just like, if you are on anything, anything, you're not welcome, or you're shamed. Or you're not family. They're very family-oriented. I'll be drumming at Oppenheimer Park in Vancouver. If somebody stumbles up and they walk from the street to hear without falling over and want to drum, take it. They're included. That's right. Like, take it. You want me to get a chair so you can sit longer? Do you need a coffee? Come and drum.
>
> I feel that, sometimes, as well, the exclusionary nature of culture is—horrible. It's horrible. And I think we've been excluded from colonization by White people for so long … but now we exclude each other, we're so fragmented that any opportunity is so rare now; invite and cultivate it. Teach and learn and share. Celebrate every Indigenous person.

Reclaiming Culture's Living Process

The participants' data signaled the revival of life within culture itself. Participants described traditional culture and highlighted the disruption and discontinuation from traditional culture to contemporary life; what emerged was the call for traditional culture to be revived within the contemporary colonial context through adaptation and integration, incorporating changes to culture that reflect the changes in the environment.

The process of reclaiming cultural evolution was illuminated, which means developing the capacity to be agile, a necessary quality to support the integration of culture and wellness values in the contemporary colonial context. As demonstrated by the data, cultural evolution through adaptation is a foundational approach to life in the pursuit of wellness. The colonial

context requires that one's life in wellness be grounded in wellness-promoting intentions, such as culture and balance, and adapted to bring these forward in contemporary life. Three participants spoke directly to the view of traditional culture and the idea of purism as obsolete; that is, Indigenous culture and wellness are inextricable from the influence of historical and contemporary colonial forces, for this adaption is an unavoidable necessity. The culture and old ways of knowing needed to be adapted to be relevant within the contemporary colonial context. Participant A agreed:

> That's my thing. So, that's what I think Indigenous wellness is; it is combining the old ways of knowing in today's world, adapting what no longer fits and finding a way that it does work for people.
>
> Concrete—And the idea of pure tradition is so deeply ingrained in our culture. It's going to be hard to fight, but it is so necessary to challenge. We can't judge our people based on our old ways, our old ways of being, when the world that we live in is nothing like that anymore. It's not fair, and it's not a good way to move forward, and it's not Indigenous at all; Indigenous people always were adaptable. Condemning adaptation is a colonized way of blaming and shaming. And it's so important to let people connect to their culture in whatever way that they're able to at the moment. And even smoking. Smoking can be cultural if you're framing it as "tobacco is sacred Medicine." If this is important to you right now, keeping you alive, let's go out and have a smoke. And you can frame it that way. A lot of my meetings ended with, "Let's go for a smoke. Let's go for a smoke. I don't smoke, but let's sit and just be, and you can take a smoke, and I'm not going shame you for any of it." So that was a huge, huge, huge part that I would like to advocate, but

> at the same time, I'm terrified of the judgement I will get for saying this. But this gives me the perfect place to say it; we need to adapt. I said what I said.

Participants further exemplified the discovery that, in light of exposure to diverse cultures and limited access to their culture, they have found a myriad of ways to resourcefully revitalize, accumulate, and integrate diverse Wisdom teachings that will promote wellness in the contemporary colonial context. Participant S recounted her experience of accumulating and integrating Wise-teachings from a plethora of sources throughout her life to support wellness, including her Indigenous territory; "I mean, I've had a bit of knowledge from home. But, when I think of my own teachings, they're a combination of land-based teachings and teachings from three of my homes, and territories, and peoples of Turtle Island."

Participant L explained that, for his wellness, he has integrated contemporary and Western approaches like Alcoholics Anonymous and woven them with Indigenous cultural teachings like those found in Wellbriety, an Indigenous adaptation of AA. He sees the diverse cultural healing approaches as offering gifts to support healing and wellness:

> The other part that I've seen is [that] people learn to take the good parts of any healing program and other cultures. Everything has something to offer. For example, when people start working on their twelve steps in the Wellbriety program, many people question, "Okay, the twelve steps, Wellbriety, cultures, how does it work together?" Well, you got the Medicine Wheel teachings, you got the twelve steps teachings, and they combine to make Wellbriety. But what really holds it together is the culture and the ceremonies. Right? That's what holds Wellbriety really strong. And so, for myself, actually, with [*unnamed*], he was already teaching me about Wellbriety when I first sobered up. But we

> didn't have that concept. But what he was doing was teaching me about AA, and he was teaching me about Sweat Lodge. Right? And back and forth; culture, culture, culture, weave it in.

Reclaiming Cultural Values

Participants actively reclaimed cultural values that served as their guiding framework and inspired the participant's life. *Balance* was the first model that emerged that also serves to demonstrate the values underpinning culture and wellness. The participants illustrated unique expressions of the values that all promoted wellness and served as the impetus for specific life engagements. They shared the fact that the reclamation of cultural values goes hand-in-hand with the integrity of living in balance and with each of the subsequent cultural values that became illuminated. Participants described the well-known seven Aboriginal values, as well as *simplicity,* and *living in a good way.*

Reclaiming Balance

Participants all named *balance* when describing wellness as the foundational model and value system. Embedded in culture is the core understanding that wellness is balance. The participants illustrated the notion that reclaiming balance refers to reclaiming the practice of naturally evaluating the balance of the strength in one's life, which promotes wellness. Personal balance describes mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects, while relational balance includes balancing all one's relations. Balance requires self-inquiry and embodied living so that one can hear what aspects of self (mental, emotional, and physical) require attention and care. As Participant D maintained:

> Well, for me, wellness is balance, right? I think it's the balance within all the quadrants of health and wellness. Mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. And so, when you feel a balance, that's what defines wellness. But there's also another surrounding layer around that, too, right, because I look at the emotional and spiritual component of it. So that's a part of wellness that—When you look at mainstream models of wellness, it's very much focused on the physical aspects, right? You're unwell. You go see the doctor. And it's from a deficit perspective, right?
>
> Whereas, I think, in our Indigenous perspective, wellness is not an assessment of a deficit illness model. It's where you feel this balance, right? You are looking at the things that enhance your life and always balancing them. And a lot of that balance also comes from external and relational resources. And it's not just the physical aspects of it. It's being connected to the land. It's being connected to culture and others.

Participant J further described the embodiment of balance; "So, balance is being able to listen, care, and respond to come back into balance. Doesn't mean I'm in that balanced place all the time. It's being able to know when that part is calling to me, right, and when I have to pay attention."

Reclaiming Integrity

Participants' responses affirmed that integrity is essential to health and wellness. Integrity was described as living honestly and purposefully matching one's mind and values with one's behaviour. Values themselves are consistent across contexts, but how the value is expressed is unique in different contexts and individuals. The value inspires the individual's behaviour and roots their life in meaning. As the participants demonstrated, they consciously create their lives

through their aligning behaviours with wellness values. Participant J contended that, "I think we need to be clear about our values and standing in them; they are essential to wellness." As Participant M also noted; "One of the teachings I was given through Native American church is that most people are insane. To be considered sane, your thoughts, words, and actions need to be in alignment, and most people are not. You must work on your sanity before you can work on your wellness."

As Participant S pointed out, Indigeneity has always centered on integrity, which has been poisoned through colonization but can be reclaimed through language. Indigenous integrity is exemplified through Indigenous language. The Indigenous language is intentionally descriptive and honest, infused with integrity. Participant S advised that, when one strays from honesty and acting in alignment, one will be unwell:

> I think that it's important for any Indigenous person to be grounded in language, which is also grounded in the land because language came from the land. And, if they get too far away from that, then they become [*Indigenous language spoken*], which is—In our language, it means "crazy-thinking." Their thoughts become too divided, and they start taking everything and separating it. And that's what [*Indigenous language spoken*] is, it's chaos. Whereas, in the grounded way of thinking, with your language and how our languages describe things, [it's] very descriptive. Right. Our Indigenous languages are very descriptive. They're not like the English language that can have multiple meanings. And then, [Indigenous] languages stem from the land. The land is what taught us our language, all the teachings and everything; it is very specific so we can survive and thrive. So, our thinking process, when we're Indigenous, is very relational, and it's very

> cyclical, and it's very holistic, and it's very honest and very truthful; it has integrity. So, being grounded in that, I think, is what people need to remember for wellness.

Reclaiming Humility

Humility was identified as an important value to be reclaimed. Reclaiming humility means offering one's gifts when appropriate and serving with gratitude. Humility is decentering oneself; knowing when to step aside and hold others up when there is opportunity. All participants spoke about the importance of humility. This meant that participants recognized that they were equal to those they were helping. Participant L represented humility in this example, as he recognized he can be of support, but that does not mean he needs to be the center. He exemplified humility by acknowledging the potential for someone else, the Elder, to have space to offer their gifts that may be more appropriate. He does not feel worthless; the opposite is true. He understands his value but also recognizes the value in others and makes space to honour and invite their contributions:

> I get challenged all the time, especially with the role I am on Chief and Council. And there's an opportunity to be able to support. And this is a big difference for me, too. When I was first on council, from 2006 to 2009, I was all about leading the people and my ego. Well, this time, all I'm about is supporting the people and holding them up.
>
> Support is different from leading. For example, before I came here, I was asked yesterday afternoon to come to the open house for education and do an opening address and a prayer for the education department. Sure, I'll do that. So, went there. I got there and visited with the people for a while. Then they called me up. But I also saw an Elder there. So, I asked the Elder to come up with me. It's not all about me, my younger self. I know

> it would have been about me before. I would have stood in front of that … room, preaching for 20 minutes on my soapbox about education. All I did was welcome the people, thank them, and let the Elders do the prayer. I really just want to support, and I'm just thankful. But I only plan to do this term for another 30 months to set up our community's healing foundation. And then, I want to be able to work on the Wellbriety stuff with the people. Yeah, I see that. That's a calling for me.

Reclaiming Simplicity

Another theme arising from the data was the *reclamation of simplicity*, which means consciously striving to simplify one's life. Participants explained that, in the colonial context, life can become complicated, much more than necessary. Reclaiming simplicity is stripping away complicated factors in life, so that what is left is nothing more than what is needed for wellness. Participant S spoke about her most revered Elder, who, for her, embodies wellness. Participant S connected the Elder's simple way of life with tradition and with the land:

> In terms of wellness, she is the embodiment of a current Native woman who still lives that [traditional] way, who still lives with the teachings of her family, with the land. She's always lived close to the land. She has a large family. She just lives a simple lifestyle and that is important, nothing fancy.

Participant L echoed the importance of keeping life, healing, and wellness simple and rooted in nature:

> As I grow and heal, I have more of an "I don't need" mentality. Whether we're sitting in a Sweat Lodge praying, going to the creek and jumping in, doing a Smudge, singing a song, going for a walk on the mountain, spending time on the land, going talking to an

> Elder, spending time with my family, or being a part of a community event. That's all Medicine for me now. That's the solution for me, right? Going to a powwow, sitting there listening to a drum, going there and pinching tobacco on the drum, asking for prayers. That's all Medicine. So, yeah, when it comes to healing, when it comes to those kinds of teachings, they're not very complicated, but we as human beings make it complicated. I try to keep my life as simple as possible, and the less stressed, the better it is.

Reclaiming Indigenous Success

It became evident from the data that the *reclamation of success and wealth*, as redefined by Indigenous people themselves, is part of healing and ongoing wellness. Indigenous success is, inherently, resistance to the normalized and assumed concept of success within the Western colonial context. It refers to Indigenous people who are striving to reclaim and live in wellness in the contemporary colonial context. Participant M explained that his understanding of Indigenous success is not the same as the Western concept of success:

> I don't think you can live perfectly well in the lifestyle of normal Western culture. That's why a lot of people started and are having problems and began reaching out to other Indigenous cultures around the world to find what it is that made them feel not whole. People reached out to yogis in the Himalayas and India, and I think that is why many people started practicing martial arts or drinking ayahuasca and reached out to First Nations people to find out what it was that was making [Western people] feel hollow. The Western ways are empty, and the Indigenous ways are fulfilling and have Spirit. The Indigenous people know what the Western culture has to offer isn't going to fulfil you, so I try not to try for the Western way of life. That's not success.

Reclaiming Indigenous Wealth

Several wellness experts highlighted the reclamation of Indigenous wealth, redefining the definition of wealth by Indigenous people in a capitalist colonial context. Indigenous wealth is the capacity for grace and the ability to see beauty in life; connection to nature and one‘s family and health. Participant S explained that her understanding of Indigenous wealth goes beyond money to include all one's relations, nature, culture, and family:

> Traditionally, I don't know if we had money. I think we used to trade. I don't know if we had an actual form of currency. Maybe some of the people, they had stationary settlements and bigger dwellings and things. Maybe they had currency. But I think, for a lot of us, we didn't have that. So, if money is part of the White man's world, it's going to go along with the White man's thinking and the White man's views of success. But, as Native people, I don't think we should measure ourselves that way.
>
> Where real wealth comes—I remember we had a ceremony here. It was my kid's dad's ceremony. I think it was our fourth feast ceremony since he passed away. So, we would have one every year for four years. And we had everything all set up. It was a beautiful lodge that we had created, and fir boughs were on the ground. We had a wood stove, and tea, and we invited all the relatives to come. And one of the Elders says, "Boy, we're so rich." I know. We got clean air, we got clean water. We've got all this traditional food. And then we have this beautiful dwelling right on the land. And then we have all of these relatives. And we felt so rich. It was very humble. It was very, very rich. That is wealth; that is what we should strive for.

Reclaiming Relational Wellness

The participants' data brought to the surface the reclamation of relational wellness, which is all one's relations. Relational wellness is the essential reciprocal relationship rooted in contributing to the participants' lives for healing and wellness. The participants actively reclaimed the following; belonging, Indigenous wellness contribution, Indigenous connection through shared colonial pain, wellness-promoting relations, and the Elder's guidance. Participants also reclaimed family, community, Indigenous role models, a wellness-promoting social network, and connection to the land.

Reclaiming Indigenous Belonging

A theme reflected in the data was the *reclamation of belonging*, which means a sense of belonging to and with other Indigenous relations and all one's relations. It is a felt sense of belonging with and to one's Indigeneity. The reclaiming and embodied sense of belonging surfaced in many participants' discussions. Belonging offered a satiating wholeness that one embodied as one healed and lived in wellness; a sense of belonging that was new and had never existed previously. Some participants acknowledged, in particular, that everyone has Indigenous belonging somewhere. However, given the current context, they may have a more challenging time or have to look further back to re-cover their belonging that inherently is identified as a gift or blessing. Participant M noted:

> One thing I have realized through my healing is belonging. The biggest thing I find, the biggest difference between Indigenous people, is that we actually have a sense of who we are in regards to having a home, where we come from. I know I come from La Ronge. I can physically see the land where my Ancestors lived and died for thousands of years. If

> ever things don't work out for me in [*unnamed*], if ever things don't work for me wherever I'll be next, I always have a place I know I can call home. I will always have a place with relatives, even if they are not a first cousin or brother or sister. I mean, that is a blessing of being Indigenous. I can't imagine how it would feel to be walking around Edmonton and think, "Where is home? I was raised in a town, but my family moved there from somewhere and somewhere else, and some came from Europe," and not even know where home is.

Reclaiming Indigenous Wellness Contribution

Another theme in the data was the reclamation of Indigenous connection through one's reclaimed community, family, or peer network, which provides the necessary foundation of inherent belonging and a place to contribute. Contributions might be through cultural and wellness roles, like those of Elders, role models, and Healers, which contribute to other Indigenous people's healing and wellness. Indigenous contribution is vital for one's healing wellness; therefore, individuals need other Indigenous people to contribute, as well. However, where Indigenous relations were not accessible, participants sought wellness-promoting connections that were non-Indigenous. The overarching theme across all the data was that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people could support one's healing and wellness, but Indigenous people's healing and wellness contributions were always Indigenous-focused for an Indigenous relational contribution.

Wellness contribution is the foundational source of living in wellness. Healing requires reclaiming contribution. All the participants indicated that the hallmark shift of healing and living in wellness took place when taking on a wellness contribution role and finding creative

ways to contribute to others' wellness. As Participant M explained, "I went from just serving my own selfish needs and learned that, in fact, all your time should be spent promoting your relations' wellness." Every participant articulated the concept that wellness contribution is essential to a life of wellness. Participant L shared that this contribution was centered in "helping others. Serving is a gift, ultimate success."

Wellness contribution is so important that, as Participant M pointed out, it is the foundation of the Indigenous worldview. His definition of spirituality has a core strand of contribution—bettering self for others—braided into the definition:

> My interpretation of spirituality, definitely not everyone's, is that it acknowledges your place in the universe, in this world, in the lives of the people around you, acknowledging the great mystery I call the Creator or God, always trying to better those relationships with yourself, the world, other humans.

Participant J also articulated the role of giving back in regard to wellness; "Giving back to the Indigenous people and community, I think, is really part of contemporary Indigenous wellness, [and] for me, anyways, is being able to, through teaching or work with Indigenous people … sharing whatever I have that could be helpful."

Participant A maintained that she strives to focus on her wellness, but her wellness is inspired by serving others. Her calling to serve in a good way fuels her desire to invest in her personal healing and wellness:

> It's funny because I say it's me, me, me; I focus on my needs a lot. I want what I want, but, from the beginning, it's all been about how you can be in service, too. So, on the one hand, it's really about what I need so I can be of service. And that's what it is. So, it's

> like, I have to be alive and well to be in service. I have to be alive to be in service. So, what can I do to stay alive and heal, and what can I do to service people? Now, my more healing brain says, "Okay, we don't have to be in flight or fight anymore so, what are we going to do to do for others in a good way, for the people and for me?"

Reclaiming Indigenous Connection Through Shared Colonial Pain

The data suggest that the reclamation of colonial pain serves to reclaim, and become a source of, Indigenous connection. Participants noted that, within this contemporary colonial context, where there has been prolific colonial trauma and a division of Indigenous people, the reclamation of one's colonial pain can be a source of connection and healing for other Indigenous people. Participant interviews exposed the idea that every Indigenous person touched by colonialization who is reclaiming and illuminating the collective stories can be a source of connection and can offer validation, normalization, connection, and healing from colonial experience. The shared pain provides safety and belonging and a sense of not being alone, according to Participant A:

> The shared pain—All of us have some colonial trauma, so using it to create a feeling of connection and understanding is healing. I'm known in my circles as very frequently offering self-disclosure. Building a relationship using our [Indigenous] shared experience is important, and it's a reality that we shouldn't shy away from. It's so necessary. I call a lot of my youth "my kids," even though they're hardly five years younger than me, and that's what it is. I frontload it. I'm like, "A lot of my work that I do comes from my own experiences" … This is to help us process for you, and honestly, it ties in with suicide; the older that we get and we share those things we struggled with, like suicide, the [more

> we] can see that we've made it. It is inspiring for them. Part of the suicide ideation, which is such a core concern and [a] troubled thing, with reserves especially, is the colonization, the fear, the shame, the pain, the discrimination that makes our world so small that we can't see beyond it. We literally cannot see tomorrow, so, the first thing that comes to mind is ending it. But, if we're able to share with people—whatever's safe enough, that we've been there—to an extent, it can give hope.

Reclaiming Wellness-Promoting Relations

The theme of reclaiming relational wellness is reclaiming *wellness-promoting relations*. Wellness-promoting relations inherently promote the participants' healing and wellness. Surprisingly, in many examples, the relations that were reclaimed involved the essence of the relation, and not the literal relation. The focus of participants was on the role of the relationship in their lives and less on the literal Western-defined construct of the relationship. The relations that participants reclaimed included the guidance of an Elder, community, family, role models, a wellness-promoting social network, and connection to the land.

Reclaiming the Elder's Guidance

Several wellness experts brought to the forefront the reclamation of the voice of the Elder and Elder behaviour. Interestingly, I noticed that participants did not reference a literal Elder; they referenced the essence or Spirit of the Elder that they would draw on as a wellness-promoting source. I noticed, from the data, that most participants did not have anyone playing the role of an Elder in their life; there was the realization that the role needed to be reclaimed, and that they needed to become one. Individuals are reclaiming their role by living with the

intention of becoming an Elder and living in alignment with the vision of Elder behaviour. Participant L explained:

> I did not have healthy Elders or role models, but I often imagine what they would be and then act accordingly. I said to my [AA] sponsor one day, "I should go do the steps again." He goes, "L, you've done the steps four or five times now." He goes, "You've got to start living these steps." He goes, "What kind of Elder do you want to be, L?" I said, "Excuse me?" He said, "What kind of Elder do you want to be?" He goes, "You got to look at the kind of quality of sobriety you want, and that's the kind of Elder you're going to be."
>
> I looked at him, and I said—At first, I said, "I don't know." He goes, "Well, you need to know, because anybody can sober up, but you need to have motivation on what kind of person you want to be in your sobriety." I think about that a lot. That question, it's all a blessing. For me, I hope that we all grow old and become good Elders.

Participant S shared that she makes a conscious effort to embody Elder-like behaviour in her roles and draws on how she envisions an Elder:

> I'm older, and I have some Wisdom because of life experience, and I know how important encouragement is. Even at work, I feel like I offer that [Elder role] a little bit, because I'm understanding and compassionate. I am always encouraging people there, saying, "Oh, you're doing such a good job, and you're doing this. And I really appreciate this about you." Just telling them things like an Elder would almost tell them.

Reclamation of an Elder's guidance is reconnecting to the Elder's Wise-teachings and Spirit. Reclaiming the Elder's teachings that were not received because of colonization is a

visioning exercise or engagement with culture. For only a few, a healthy Elder is accessible. For others, connecting to Elder Wisdom happens through engagement with culture or envisioning an Elder and calling on the voice to inspire what their message would have said.

Participant D recounted that, for her, it is re-remembering and reconnecting to her grandmother's voice that promotes wellness:

> I think wellness is just something we forgot about—to really offer self-care. Also, we lost so many Elders, so it's not just that we have forgotten or walked away; maybe we did not learn, and many never had the chance for that connection to Elders. So, I think it's all the same as what our Ancestors, and for me, what my grandparents would've taught or reminded us to do; I think about that sometimes. What would my grandparents do? I think about their voice, and that guides me now.

Reclaiming Community

Throughout the data, the importance of reclamation of community[3] to support healing and wellness was paramount. Participants illustrated the unique and self-determined communities they have constructed in the face of colonization and within the barriers of engaging with an Indigenous community within the contemporary colonial context. For some, a community is just one person, or, for others, a community might be a blending of diverse people who offer support, or, further, a community could be an organized healing community, such as AA or Wellbriety. Communities can, for some people, consist of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people; for others, it may be found through Indigenous groups, such as place of

[3] Within the Indigenous context, "community" often refers to one's Indigenous community as designated by colonizers and recorded on one's status card or the equivalent. However, in this research, *community* will refer to a healing and wellness community personally created by the individual, which may include both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

employment, an Indigenous organization, or an urban Indigenous group like a Friendship Centre. There is no shame or judgement about what a community looks like. Every participant reclaimed some form of community as a source of healing and wellness. As Participant A observed:

> That's the sad part, going back to healing and Indigenous wellness, which is that we're so community-based, but not like community used to be. The pain and the trauma are so deeply entrenched that I don't think it can be community-based healing anymore. If someone doesn't have a community, we need to create one. Individually, we can still heal and make our own community. The world has shifted so much from what it used to be. And, like what we said, we cannot bring it back. We have to find something else that works, and it's trying to find a balance between individual healing done with a healing community behind you. For my healing here in Vancouver, on the whole, I would say that's a good question. My community for healing has always been—I've always identified one person. I don't know how, or why it's been how my trauma manifested—and it took me a while to learn that—but I found one point person who can help me get through. And that came up in the form of my Aboriginal ed. worker.

Participant J discussed the contemporary challenge of reclaiming community and how community is redefined within modern life:

> I don't really have an Aboriginal community right now. Right? And this is, I think, unique to contemporary life, isn't it, around—And I live in an urban context. I haven't lived in my home community in a long time. I'm sort of free-floating. I want to become involved in maybe the local Métis around here. I could reach out and see; it's vulnerable,

> but it's needed because it's having that sense of sort of feeling tethered, right, to something, for sure.
>
> One way I have connected in the past is through giving back to the community, which I think is really part of contemporary Indigenous wellness. For me, anyway, it is being able to, through teaching or working with the community, but sharing whatever I have that could be helpful. Yeah. And by "community," we mean contemporary community, whatever Indigenous context we're in or create. There are numerous communities, I find, in those contexts. For example, the community I'm working with, like a Nation, the urban community, Metis, or the Friendship Centre.

Participant L shared the numerous sources of community that he has connected with to support his healing, including non-Indigenous communities, such as AA:

> At first, my community was AA. I started going to [AA] programming and started working on myself. Got a really good sponsor. He's still my sponsor, to this day. The guy has 48 years of sponsorship—48 years of sobriety, himself. And he's an old-timer. He knows the program really well. I picked him, and I'm so glad I did, because I started getting to know him. And I started seeing the values and principles of the program, the Wisdom that this gentleman has, and the love he has for the people. He's not Native, but he sure taught me a lot. He's my sponsor. How do I learn how to have a life of wellness? Other men have shown me the way.

Reclaiming Family

Participants brought forward the concept of *reclamation of the family*. In the case of some participants, their families have been reclaimed. For others, reclaiming blood family was not a

privilege due to colonization. For them, healing involved reclaiming a family that would promote healing and wellness. The data demonstrated that reclaiming family is twofold; first, it involves reclaiming family members stolen from colonization and finding family members displaced around the world. Second, reclaiming family is finding people who can fulfill familial roles to support healing and wellness; in a contemporary context, a family can be made up of blood or chosen relatives. Some participants expressed their feeling that, in a contemporary colonial context, as with the community, family is now not accessible, healthy, or safe. While all participants noted the importance of family, not everyone has access to a healthy, well, and supportive family because of the multitude of colonial traumas.

Participant J shared her belief that reclaiming family may be reclaiming non-blood relations who play familial roles. J articulated the barriers she has witnessed and experienced with family relations, and she challenged the shame-based and unrealistic narrative that Indigenous people should be close to and have access to healthy families within the historical and ongoing colonial context:

> And, just with that, on family, I think that there's a lot of—We hear that a lot, and I always see that in the research and everything on how Indigenous families are and how important they are. Yes, they are, but also, the whole other side is not spoken of, and it can result in feeling something is wrong with you because you do not have family. The focus is all about families and community. The underlying assumption is that we have access to those. And my experience has been that that's not always true in my own life, and [it's] what I hear from clients in counselling as well. Many families are fractured and with good reason. Trauma. And so, I think that, too, for my wellness, sometimes it is

> staying away from family. It's having those boundaries around the people that are not helpful for me to be around, whether they're family or not. Right? And it's almost like many may need to make their own family of people who fill those roles. I think the idea about families is nice, but really, there are a lot of stereotypes in the literature about families, and I think [that], without naming the colonial context, it will make us feel defective, right, because they don't have that type of [whole, healthy] Indigenous family. When we look at the trauma that happened, it's almost an oxymoron; it is rare.

Participant A illustrated the reclamation of direct family. A shared the way that she was able to reclaim a familial relation—her grandmother—that was stolen because of colonization, and the healing impact of the reconnection:

> It was a huge healing moment for me, for me to connect with my dad's mom and just know that I have another grandma because, before that, I didn't. Before that, my one grandma was a residential school survivor. My dad's a Sixties Scoop survivor, so that's where that family line ended. So, that was really, really, really, really cool. Heartbreaking, though. Hearing about the last time she saw him and not knowing who we were. It is a really huge loss, especially—I'm young to be connecting with family, but it's still 27 years that she's never known me and that I've never had her, and I had to grow up without that, and just stuff like that. So anyways, that's where my dad's from. That was a huge moment. And I actually do really like to share that. And I genuinely don't mind sharing it outwards because we—It can go either way. I've met other people who have found their birth mom from the Sixties Scoop, and she wants nothing to do with them.

Reclaiming Indigenous Role Models

One participant considered how Indigenous role models were being reclaimed after having been obscured by colonial trauma. Role models can model wellness-living. Many people did not have role models in their lives, so present-day role models are now becoming the role models they never had. Participant A shared that she had never had a role model, so she now strives to be one. One way she attempts to live as a role model is by modelling transparency and personal accountability, for her clients:

> I never really had role models; there was a lot of trauma around me, so now I work on role modelling. For example, part of role-modelling is demonstrating taking accountability and transparency. I've been sick a lot, and I've been off work a lot lately. And it's partially because I'm stressed out; my body's just breaking down. I had COVID, too. I was off, and something fell through the cracks. And I came back, and I'm like, "I'm so sorry." Like, "I'm sorry. I was out of it last week. I apologize. That was my bad. But I'm here to fix it. I've already called to see what we can do." Like, "Let's do this together." Like, owning it …Yeah, not making excuses. It is important for others to see me model accountability … That's why I struggle a lot. And I recognized a big part of my own struggle—It's so funny because I try so hard to be a role model. But I also recognize, everybody—like, we're talking about, nobody's perfect. It is the constant balance.

Reclaiming Wellness-Promoting Social Network

A wellness-promoting social network emerged as another group of relations that supported healing and wellness for participants. A *social network* was described as peers that are

sought out to support healing and the pursuit of wellness. These peers will support, encourage, and fight for one's healing and wellness. Participant L shared that he reclaimed wellness-promoting peers who would support his ongoing wellness:

> Well, I was very fortunate to meet Elders and other good people. When I stopped drinking and doing drugs in 1987, I found two individuals … [*Unnamed*] played sports like I did, baseball and hockey, and he protected me from the guys that I used to drink with in the dressing room or on the bench while playing baseball. Anytime somebody offered me a drink, he would put his big hand in there and say, "He doesn't drink anymore." They fought for my wellness and truly supported me.

Reclaiming Connection to the Land

Reclaiming an Indigenous connection to the land is another relation that is reclaimed in this process. Reclamation of one's connection to Indigenous lands means cultivating a conscious awareness and acknowledging the Indigenous land and relations where one resides at that moment. Participants explained that reconnecting to Indigenous land catalyzes healing and reclaiming wellness in one's actual Indigenous territory or in another territory as a visitor. The common foundation was that each participant understood that they were on Indigenous territory, who's territory, and whose relations were there, which provided the feeling of Indigenous connection and belonging essential to healing and wellness.

Participant S suggested that, for healing and wellness, one needs to reconnect to one's Indigenous land, if possible, and, if not, go to the accessible land and come into relation with it, bringing a traditional offering to signify the intention of connection to one's Indigenous relations and Indigeneity:

> So, within this context of Indigenous wellness, we're talking about people who are Indigenous to a land base. So, everyone's Indigenous, in my mind. They have roots in their lands. I think it's important for the person to reconnect. Suppose they're not living in the land where their Ancestors were. I think it's important for the person to reconnect. If they're not living in their land where their Ancestors come from, to reconnect with their land. It doesn't mean they have to stay there. So, if they go back to their land and they find out what their Medicines are, and then make an offering and ask the land to teach them, tell the land that they're reconnecting, and just try and do some kind of ceremony, I guess, on the land. And … ask the Ancestors to help, too. And then, go from there, because I think that reconnection is important. I mean, I've had a bit of it with home because I was raised there for a while. I think I do carry some of it.

Participant M explained that reconnecting to the land is another layer of reconnecting to the physical dimension of wellness and other Indigenous relations. Ultimately, living in connection with the land is a primary source of fulfillment that is not readily experienced in today's life:

> You need to know where you are and where you are from; the actual land is connected to healing and wellness. Also, the physical aspect of wellness is the physical body and the earth. It's all connected. That's why it's all in a Wheel. I feel connected to all the land everywhere. Anytime I go somewhere new, I take a moment to be present with the land and introduce myself. It's a huge part of my Indigenous perspective on wellness. It is hard to explain, but something about being on the land makes a person feel whole. Part of the reason our Ancestors were so fulfilled and happy is that their life consisted of what

> we dream of as a vacation. And they would sustain themselves communally off the land and connected to it; it wasn't even like work as we know it. It wasn't perfect, but it was as close to it as you can get.

Participant D offered another description of the importance of connection to the land; it provides an opportunity for connection to nature and all relations:

> Wellness is being out on the land and in nature. Taking time to be in nature and enmeshed in it. So, for instance, where my house is, there are trails right in the forest. So, I'll walk those trails and notice all of nature and what territory I am on, and what Ancestors, Medicines, traditions are all there from the land.

Reclaiming Personal Wellness

The participants spoke in depth about their efforts to reclaim their wellness, which was described as reclaiming the forces in oneself that will promote healing and wellness, including Indigenous identity, Indigenous pride, Indigenous visibility, altruism, and balance of the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual for personal wellness.

The participants explained their intentional effort to reclaim and create personal wellness. Reclaiming personal wellness was described as intentionally creating and constructing how one will achieve balance in life. Balance was reclaimed and illuminated within Indigenous wellness values as a core value guiding wellness, and it emerges again here as the framework for personal wellness. How each person constructs and lives wellness through balance is unique, a self-determined expression of balance. Participants reflected on the creative endeavors they engaged in to construct a life of wellness. As Participant D explained:

> Wellness is unique to every individual … And when you think of wellness, you have to think of the four quadrants, and you need a little bit from all of it, right? You need a little bit from all of the quadrants to be balanced. So, culturally and physically, I like going out and sweating. And that's what we're supposed to do as people. Having those emotional connections, right, those strong, emotional, healthy relationships. And then, that spiritual connection, too, right, like, doing what you need to meditate and be quiet and reflective of your own self … [Wellness] is individual, right? It's an individualistic approach, and whatever works for you. And if it takes a bit of this and a bit of that and a piece of this and a piece of that, and if that works for your own wellness, again, that's your definition. But it's not the only one.

Reclaiming Indigenous Identity

A theme that arose was the wounding of Indigenous identities by colonization. Several participants described their identity; their felt self was poisoned with shame, the feeling that, as an Indigenous person, something was inherently wrong or broken within. Therefore, the participants expressed the notion that reclaiming identity is the embodied feeling of pride, goodness, and belonging when one says, "I am Indigenous" or "I am Cree." Reclaiming identity by the participants was articulated by one's proud ownership of one's identity. Reclaiming identity was tightly woven with reclaiming culture and language that provided a sense of self-worth, pride, and humility, with Indigeneity connected to one's relations. In Participant S's example, the emphasis is on reclaiming Indigenous identity and pride, which has been a life-long journey that began when she was a little girl and learned she was Cree:

> [Aloneness is] something I've had to sort out throughout my life. I have had a sense of being in an "alone" place my whole life since my mother and stepfather adopted me. So, I knew who I was and where I was up until I was four years of age. I spoke my language. I had Cree-speaking grandparents who raised me. That was my belonging. That's where I was supposed to be. But, since my parents moved me, I've never felt that state of belonging because I've been all over the place, and I didn't even know who I was until probably about Grade Six, somewhere around there, because my mother didn't really tell me. I instantly felt good about myself when I found out I was Cree. I felt like, "Wow, I'm Cree? Cool." Now I had a name for what I was, I knew I was different.
>
> I've been learning these things—I've got a few more that I've learned recently—and they're so beautiful. They really are amazing. And it makes you think, wow, Indigenous people and culture are amazing, but in a humble way, too. Learning language and culture makes you start thinking and feeling real and Indigenous. It makes you feel like that proud Indigenous person, and it's a totally different feeling and re-identification with yourself.

Reclaiming identity and goodness within one's identity is reclaiming the perspective and understanding that, in fact, nothing is wrong with me as an Indigenous person, and there is nothing wrong with being Indigenous; rather, there are beautiful gifts and goodness in being Indigenous, and rather, the shame should be placed on colonizers. Participant A shared:

> I have learned there's nothing wrong with me for being a Native; I always felt like something was wrong with me. But now, it's the opposite. Before, I have felt that way. It's like I don't belong here, and that feeling of not belonging is intentional, a part of

> colonization. [Colonizers] don't want me here. It's that realization and the core of my being—And I can't change it. It cuts to your core because you genuinely feel like you don't belong. It cuts so deep where you're just like, "If I don't belong here, where do I belong in the world?" Until I did healing and went to school, you walk around with that feeling until you realize there is nothing wrong with me for being Native, there is something wrong with colonization to make us feel that way.

Reclaiming Social Wellness

The participants all demonstrated the reclamation of social wellness, which is reclaiming one's behaviour within a social context to engage and interact positively and wellness-promoting for self and others.

Reclaiming Personal Visibility

To be seen in a social context and embrace one's Indigenousness is a courageous act and essential for social wellness. Numerous participants named inequities, such as racism, oppression, and discrimination, as continuous ordeals that Indigenous people face on an ongoing basis as part of their daily existence as Indigenous people in this contemporary colonial context. Participants shared that they experience consistent and ongoing experiences of inequity, racism, discrimination, and oppression when it is happening, and striving for space, and challenging it. Participants raised the paradox of experiencing ongoing colonization and discrimination while, at the same time, there is a discourse in mainstream Canada that Indigenous issues are being addressed (i.e., through reconciliation efforts). Participants demonstrated that reclaiming their visibility requires the courage to be seen and take up space where colonization has intended for Indigenous people to remain small, unseen, passive, complacent, and harmonious in the face of

colonization, systemic racism, and White "supremacy." It is the reclamation of unapologetic existence and visibility while challenging, resisting, and naming the colonial constructs. Participant J explained:

> With Indigenous people, we are not celebrated; you can tell [White] people are annoyed when we are at the table. We will be there anyway and celebrate ourselves and each other. Some of us buy into all of this stuff, too, around reconciliation, but I don't. Okay? And what the hell is "reconciliation"? We're not even at a place where we can show up at the table equally. Right? So, again, it's—So, how can reconciliation happen when you—when you're not an equal partner to have an equal voice? It can't. Can it? No. Indigenous people are not treated equally, whatsoever.

Participant A articulated that, as the only Aboriginal social navigator, she strives to address inequity in her Indigenous clients' lives regularly; the ordeal is the consistent challenge of experiencing racism, discrimination, and oppression:

> We have to do what we have to do for our people, stand up and fight for them. And I hate the whole isolation of "us and them," but that's the reality. That's what we live in. It's not me making it about race. It's the system that's built on race … It is continuous and all systemic and all racist, and it's just so sad. The outside world sees a Downtown Eastside as this thing; when you're in it, it's just a bunch of humans that are hurt. It's a whole lot of people who are recovering or just surviving the effects of the residential schools, of the Sixties Scoop, of the foster care system. It's just so sad.
>
> You know what? My friend and colleague clarified something; we constantly complain about broken systems. They're not. They're created to do what they're doing, and they're

> perpetuating it. Colonization, it's now. It's very intentional. The difference is it was okay when it was created 50 years ago, 100 years ago. Now, we're taking up space, challenging it more, voicing it a little bit more. We call the systems broken, but it's just colonization, more salient, sneaky, and hidden. But, as we get Wiser, we see the White institutional racism in everything that's happening within Canada; even the latest with Canada Post, it's very intentional. The system [of colonization] is being maintained and recreated to serve "Settlers." We're just becoming more awake to it, fighting it, and taking space. And then they're creating language to try to de-shame themselves.

Reclaiming Wellness-Promoting Behaviour

Participants reclaimed social wellness, and part of this was reclaiming wellness-promoting behaviour. Colonized behaviour was uncovered in the previous phase. Colonized behaviour can be seen as behaviour that Indigenous people have experienced and absorbed by colonizers as it was enacted on them. Then, it is enacted out onto others by Indigenous people themselves. Numerous participants acknowledged that many Indigenous people had absorbed the colonial behaviour of violence, such as bullying, aggression, condemnation, shaming, and judgement. As Participant L observed, "I acted as I was taught as a child; I knew how to be angry, violent, arrogant. I had to re-learn." Participants avowed that many of the behaviours Indigenous people exhibit are trauma reactions and the outcomes of colonial trauma; within this context, participants described working hard to reclaim the opposite of colonial behaviour, which is considered wellness-promoting behaviour and includes compassion, support, and reciprocity.

Reclaiming Compassionate Behaviour

Participant data uncovered compassion as an essential wellness-promoting behaviour that was reclaimed. A few participants spoke about their family and their colonial coping with problematic substance use; when they did so, there was no residue of blame or shame. This is an embodied example of how extracting colonial shame looks, lived, and of reclaiming wellness-promoting behaviours such as understanding and compassion. Participant S shared a story about her husband's family within the context of Indigenous colonial trauma, which creates space for compassion toward Indigenous people who suffer and cope with the traumas through addictions:

> Basically, I loved my husband's family because I was reintroduced into the Native lifestyle and the Native way of living. There were many things I loved about it because my husband's family was so good at putting food away and going out on the land, hunting, and fishing. And they were speaking their language. They were doing ceremonies. They were always together doing things. So, I felt really good that way. But they had a dark side, and that was alcoholism was in there, and I have an understanding as to why. As you learn about our history, you gain an understanding of and compassion for those in our lives who struggle. I have much more capacity than I used to for that. I don't have negative feelings toward him and I never shared any with the children. He suffered greatly in residential school. He never got over residential school. He passed away in 2009.

Reclaiming Reciprocal Behaviour

Participants spoke of *reclaiming reciprocity*, which was described as the balance of giving and receiving to promote healing and wellness. Participant L offered the teaching on the

importance of reclaiming reciprocity; that is, one must not always take but also provide an offering or gift to balance the reciprocal relationship:

> Do you know how to give back to the Creator? And they're like, "What do you mean?" I said, "Do you know how to give to the Creator?" "I'm not sure. How do you do that?" I said, "It's a really easy concept, and it's really simple." And they're like, "Okay, well, how do you do that?" I said, "Tell the Creator that you love him." I remember the first time that I was told to do that. I cried like a baby because I was so used to taking from the Creator. When we give love and give it to the Creator, right, [give] something instead of taking from the Creator, we give to the Creator. And that's a moment of healing. So, when I do this work on myself, there are two things I ask from the Creator, but only two. I want to be happy and have love, and that's an inside job, but I also offer it; it comes full circle, and that is with each other, too.

Reclaiming Supportive Behaviour

There were numerous examples from all participants who explained the importance of holding up and supporting other Indigenous people, so much so that, in the section on relationality which follows, there is an entire theme that honours the fact that each person has reclaimed their life purpose of supporting other Indigenous people in their healing. Participant R shared that supporting others was the primary attribute she wanted others to see; "So, I want to, I think, be looked at as supportive and open … I guess, supporting others and holding one another up is essential for healing and ongoing Indigenous wellness." Support was undoubtedly one of the most significant wellness-promoting behaviours that was reclaimed; all the participants

strived to support other Indigenous people and act in alignment with supportive actions for themselves and others.

Reclaiming Emotional Wellness

Living in wellness requires consistent engagement with emotional healing. As Participant L shared, "I want to say I'm living in wellness, but there are days when I'm healing because there are things that happen that trigger unhealed parts; I go back and do more healing. I'm not a saint. I'm not a perfect human being. I make mistakes."

The participants illustrated that the contemporary colonial context is inherently wounding for Indigenous people. As a result of existing in a colonial context with consistent experiences of colonial trauma wounds, one needs to engage in regularized ongoing healing to strive for wellness. For example, Participant A shared the challenges of maintaining her wellness while working as an Indigenous social worker in a pervasive colonial system that promotes and perpetuates racism, discrimination, and oppression and that inflicts wounds daily. She noted that, for a long time, living, working, and existing in colonial Canada was confusing, causing her to constantly question her experience, with an inner knowing that her regular experience in the world was painful, often invalidating, and demoralizing, until she came to realize that the pain and suffering was a result of the colonial context she lives in. Participant A explained how she witnessed colonial violence in her life and how it affected her perspective:

> Staying well and not letting it get to you is hard, so I do a lot for it, like therapy and speaking with [an] Elder. But, in instances where a micro-aggression is not so micro to me, and I'm sitting there, and I'm just trying to debrief and voice, [my colleagues] negate it. And I'm like, I used to feel gas-lit, and I feel like, is this real? Is this not real? Now,

> I've recognized that they just have different experiences, and they're never going to see things the way that I do. That doesn't invalidate my experiences, and it doesn't invalidate their experiences. It's just not going to ever equal up. So, I recognize that, overall.

Participant A went on to share her anger at the continued celebration of colonialism, such as Canada Day—another compounding layer that overlooks the Indigenous suffering, exploitation, and genocide to make Canada what it is today—and her ongoing experience of being patronized as an Indigenous person:

> It's just so much anger—Anger I have healed gets re-ignited, right? The rage that just comes out. I'm like—and that can't be well, with the anger unresolved. I need to deal with this, right? Yeah. And it's recognizing that. But it's not even individually. Anybody who's supporting Indigenous healing and wellness has to know that there's a difference between mainstream wellness and Indigenous wellness. And not in a segregating way. In a way that understands that—positions the person that's looking at it to understand that this isn't a moral thing. We don't need to be fixed. The world needs to stop harming us. And it's the same thing. That reminds me of Indigenous leadership. This is a side note. A lot of people always want to foster my Indigenous leadership, and it's so condescending and so patronizing and so disgusting. I'm so resentful of it. So, I'm like, "Do you tell White people then, [that] you want to foster their White leadership?" No, you wouldn't, because that's fucked. And then, I'm like, "What makes you think you can?" It's an assumption we already aren't leaders … That's it. But I'm like, "What gives—?" Beyond that, that itself is maddening. It's maddening that I'm not a leader because I'm not a leader based on your criteria of what a leader is like.

Participant J expressed her frustration with so-called "reconciliation" and the painful impacts of the ingenuousness. J feels anything but reconciliatory; rather, she said that Indigenous people are still invisible and oppressed and still face inequity, which is wounding. Participant L shared that, in his life, he constantly strives for wellness through healing in a contemporary colonial context rife with triggers from the legacy and consistent encounters with colonial trauma and shame:

> But I'm learning, and I still do a lot of healing. I don't get depressed as much now. If I start getting depressed, I reach out. I work on my Medicine Wheel. I get into programming. And, if I'm in depression, it only lasts for a few hours sometimes or even a day, at the most. But I'm able to get out of it now. But before, I didn't have the resources or the techniques to do that, and then I would bring everybody else down because I was suffering. Now, I stay on top of it.

Participant J articulated that living in the colonial context is inherently traumatizing, compounded with the long-term pursuit of healing historical colonial traumas; this means that Indigenous people need to have constant surveillance of themselves and the environment to keep their vision clear and keep themselves on the path to wellness:

> We still live and experience colonization and the horrible messages of subliminal and overt racism, yeah. And it is daily, right? So that's hard because you can do healing work, but then you go back into the world, and there it is again, and again, and again, and it triggers. Right? So, you always have to have your wits about you, an awareness of it and continually work on it.

Reclaiming One's Emotions

To reclaim one's emotions is to take ownership and empowerment of one's emotional experience, which includes awareness of and space to process all emotions, which is reclaiming emotional wellness. Participants expressed the belief that emotions are feelings; in essence, they are felt physically in the body and psychologically in the mind, and they are intended to guide and send signals about one's experience so that one can appropriately respond. All emotions are important to experience and be attuned to. Participant M offered the teaching that one should see all emotions with objectivity or neutrality and withhold judging any feeling as bad or good; in this way, the emotions are honoured. M counselled that one should gently sit with the feeling and experience of emotions; they are transitionary and must be invited to visit so these feelings can come and go and balance and wellness are reclaimed:

> Well, first of all, for emotional wellness, I had to learn to be with my emotions. Everyone feels all emotions at some point, and they are important, there is no negative or positive; they are all forms of feeling and expression. To feel sorrow, it's not like you would put a negative emotion out in the world, or even anger or frustration; they are not negative, you are actually just feeling them and getting rid of them. You need to have the emotions move through you; when they bottle up and you refuse to feel certain emotions, they turn into actions that can negatively affect you and the world. But, when you let them out and always make space for them in intentional ways, that's when you can be in balance in life.

It was brought to the forefront that emotions offer messages and insight into our wellness and balance states. Emotions are feelings that cue one to their mental, physical, spiritual and

relational states. Consistent presence and awareness of one's emotions are key to responding to one's needs and rebalancing as needed, according to Participant S:

> I learned, and now see, that all of those [emotions] are connected to our body and our emotions, our feelings. So, our body tells us if we're happy, if we're sad, if we're afraid. And we have to listen to those. And, if our bodies are not at ease, those feelings will come, those feelings of fear, those feelings of sadness or whatever. And it's important to listen to them and then find out why the body is doing that, and that's when you tap into your thoughts. You look at it, okay, why are you feeling like this? And you do a check-in, right? You do that check-in. So, I think emotions are like a messaging system to tell— And then, you might also be feeling very good. Like, "Oh, why am I feeling so good?" And then, you kind of detach your mind thinking to that, "Oh, yeah. Because it's this."
>
> And we'll feel it in our gut, right? A lot of those sensations come from the gut, which they say is "the second mind." So, it's important. I always tell my children that if they go to a place and they're not feeling good about it, they have to listen to that. And don't let your mind say, "Oh, it's okay." No, listen to that gut instinct, that gut feeling. So, living in wellness, in that sense, like, with the mental, emotional and physical, is like living in an embodied way. Your whole self viscerally existing or entering into any moment or space. I think of those guys on Wall Street and those who are really into money and business, and whatever they do over there, they're probably ignoring their body, their gut, their emotions.

Reclaiming Contemplative Reflection

Another theme appearing in the data was the reclamation of contemplative reflection as a way to care for emotional wellness. To engage in contemplative reflection is to take deliberate time in solitude, as one would in meditation, to reflect, to notice one's thoughts, and integrate one's thoughts with the embodied emotions to process, offering balance to emotional and mental wellness, as Participant J explained:

> Emotional and mental wellness; that's about taking time for myself to reflect, sometimes to meditate. But quiet time to be with myself and my thoughts, to kind of get behind my thoughts, sort of taking care of that part of myself, knowing when I'm in the loop of rumination and being able to—Or obsession, and getting myself out of that, and taking care of my emotions by not running away from them but being able to—Now I'm doing the emotional as well, but being able to name what I'm feeling and sit with it, regardless of how uncomfortable that is, until it passes.

Reclaiming Grounding

Another theme appearing in the data was the *reclamation of grounding*, that is, to recover the embodied sense of feeling rooted to the ground, with one's whole self—mental, emotional, physical—in the present moment. Participant S shared that, "If someone gets ungrounded, I think a place to start is to go get grounded literally. Literally, with the ground, with the Earth, can help one get connected to self and the land again; I have done this." Participant J further explained her own approach to grounding:

> Hearing things from conversations with those close to me, as well as reflecting on some of the workshops that I participated in; in particular, mindfulness—I learned that it is

> important to come back to the basics, even just being aware of yourself, mind, body, emotions, and your current experience; that alone is a good technique for grounding and restoring some level of balance again. And just noticing how I'm feeling and being mindful is one thing [to support wellness].

Similarly, Participant L claimed, "I do a lot to keep myself grounded and connected because there are things that can pull me this way, there are things that can pull me that way [from wellness], and I need to stay aware of myself so I can take care of myself."

Reclaiming Self-Love

The participants revealed the reclamation of self-love. To reclaim self-love means to offer and relate to oneself with compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and care. Participants expressed the essence of self-love, which is being attuned to oneself with the intention of responding with care. It was revealed from an analysis of the data that love is essential and is reclaimed in healing, in the pursuit of wellness. It was unveiled that self-love was intentionally cultivated and offered as an aspect of wellness. For example, Participant L spoke in depth about love. He suggested that the path to developing self-love is through culture and peer connections, which was necessary to cultivate healing and wellness. Now, love is an essential part of life that he consciously cultivates for others, as was offered to him. Participant L reiterated:

> I knew how to abuse myself. I didn't know how to love myself. And learning about the culture, I learned really quickly that I was able to learn how to love myself, not just physically, but emotionally, physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. I was able to have that growth. I started seeing the values and the principles of the program, the Wisdom that this gentleman has, and the love that he has for the people. He's not Native,

> but he sure taught me a lot … A lot of stuff people work on when I support them, even with me, is hard stuff, shame, regret, and harm we have caused. I used to feel guilty as they do, right, on some of the things I did in my drinking and my drugs, right? I had to learn how to forgive myself. Right? Self-forgiveness, love, and compassion are real keys to moving forward for healing for oneself and others.

This participant expressed his feeling that reclaiming self-love in the form of care is imperative for healing and wellness. Participant R exemplified the Wisdom of self-compassion and love through her inner dialogue, by doing something that was challenging:

> I said last week that I wanted to do a quick dip in the water, I learned to care for myself this way as a form of love and then just start my year off that way. And I can't remember what had me so busy that I didn't do it, or I didn't have someone to maybe do it with me, I don't know, or support me. I guess it felt like I needed support. So, you know what? I didn't get to go into the water until we were at strategic planning. So, March. And all the time, I've been thinking, like, "I just need that water. I need the water."
>
> I mean, I could have easily gone to the lake and did my tobacco offering the way that I said that. And I made myself feel a little bit bad for not honouring myself for listening to that, I guess, call, or that urge, or whatever, but I won't be too hard on myself. Instead, I was compassionate. Beating yourself up doesn't do any good; it takes a lot of strength and dedication to go in the water. I need a lot of discipline to go in the water in the winter, but I will when I am ready.

Reclaiming Mental Wellness

Participants illustrated the reclamation of mental well-being as recovering the balance of the psychological state of mind. The perspectives embraced concepts which promote wellness, such as an Indigenous perspective, a generational perspective, a relational perspective, a wellness-promoting perspective, an inherent moral goodness perspective, a temporary and transitionary perspective, and a presence perspective.

Reclaiming Wellness Promoting Perspectives

Participants also offered their perspectives that support healing and wellness. Wellness-promoting perspectives consider the wellness of oneself and the future generations; the perspectives are holistic, considering all one's relations, and they are perspectives that will promote a balanced and clear mind that will always enhance one's personal and relational life.

Reclaiming the Generational Perspective

All the participants acknowledged the generational perspective in their understanding of Indigenous wellness. Wellness considers generational wellness and the impacts of one's wellness on all one's relations. Specifically, Participant D mentioned seven generations; other participants did not make a specific numerical reference, but linked the importance of generational impact to their current lives and to a consideration of the future wellness of all one's relations. D stated that, "Wellness, for me, around here, it's seven-generational thinking, right? It's seven-generational thinking that wellness is not just for your own self, as for your own self, but for your parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, and future generations. So, when you think of yourself being in there, there are seven generations around you."

Reclaiming the Relational and Holistic Perspective

All participants spoke in depth about the holistic and relational worldview being paramount for Indigenous wellness. Participant S explained it in this way; “So, our thinking process and perspective when we’re Indigenous is very relational, and it’s very cyclical, and it’s very holistic, and it’s very honest and very truthful. So, becoming grounded in that. I think that is what people need to remember.”

Participant D described relationality from the perspective of the quadrants, lifespan, and generations, saying; “That’s what wellness looks like to me, from an Indigenous perspective, that it’s from the cradle to the grave, and it encompasses the mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical wellness components, but for all generations and future generations.”

Participant A offered an example of the perspective of relationality in terms of her wellness and the relational impacts on the Indigenous individuals she serves. A’s wellness is directly related to her clients’ wellness and the direct impact her healing has on her clients’ healing:

> But luckily, and not luckily, again, something from my own Indigenous wellness and my [clients’] wellness. I have an Indigenous counsellor that I do supervision with once a month, and then I have my other Indigenous counsellor friend that I do supervision with every week. And then, on top of that, I have Elder [*unnamed*], who I see. I can call him whenever, but it’s usually about every other week I’ll see him. And I bring my cases to them. This way, I bring my own healing to [my clients]. Half of my work is my own healing, over half of it, because that impacts how I show up to work and serve; the more I work on my healing, the more healing I can offer in relation with.

Participant S described the teachings she receives from learning her language; for instance, that the Indigenous paradigm is cyclical and holistic, and that this teaching comes to us through the land that gave the language; “Our Indigenous languages are very descriptive. They’re not like the English language. And then, their languages stem from the land. The land is what taught us our language, all the teachings and everything, so, our thinking process when we’re Indigenous is very relational.”

Reclaiming an Inherent Moral Goodness Perspective

The participants demonstrated the necessity of reclaiming the goodness in oneself and one’s identity, and of reclaiming a perspective that there is goodness in all one’s relations. When describing wellness and the outlook on healing and wellness for Indigenous people, there was uniform agreement that Indigenous people have experienced prolific colonial trauma, and that any so-called “shame” and moral judgements are purged from the psyche. Participants portrayed Indigenous people as inherently good and morally valuable. When participants described an Indigenous person acting in a manner incongruent with wellness, it was understood that they are struggling with colonial trauma. Colonial behaviours are extracted from the individual, and it is understood that their harmful behaviour is not who they are; it is a result of colonial poison, trauma, suffering, and pain.

Participant R shared a beautiful example that exemplified how she now embraces an unwavering perspective of the inherent goodness within an Indigenous community member who struggled with harmful substance use and the negative impacts that come with living with and coping with harmful substances. R compassionately shared that this individual and his offerings have inherent goodness and are gifts, despite the judgement that society and the rest of the

community may project onto them. There is no shame in coping with substances until healing and wellness can be reclaimed; underneath, deep within, the individual who is coping in harmful ways is a human in need of both compassion and someone to believe in their inherent goodness.

Participant R's story is about a young eagle carver with "addictions." R shared that, in the community's eyes, the carver and his carving would commonly be rejected because of his so-called "addictions", but R does not see it that way; instead, she sees his, and the carving's, inherent value. R offered no judgement, but patience, and the readiness and willingness to hold this carving until this individual is ready. This is a story that embodies the perspective of inherent goodness, according to Participant R:

> Well, I guess what is fresh in my mind is how we view our people. Just the other day, I received this carving, and it's an eagle head carving. It has eagle feathers. It's glued on. It was carved by one of our young men in the community … Not to take anything away from the person who carved it; they were going through addiction. Many people would not even take it because they would say it has bad energy or something, but I don't see it that way. It is still good, and it can get smudged, and we can pray for him too. And I think that's the way that we need to—I think when we say, "We're meeting people where they're at"—and, even though this person was going through addiction, had an addiction, the fact that he even started this beautiful carving is commendable. It's an eagle head, and it's actually made to be worn. So, on the inside, it has the brace or the bracket, whatever, and it's put in there pretty good, and there are some eagle feathers glued on the top, and it looks like it has an abalone shell for the eyes and around the nose. It's really nice. Some

> cedar hanging. It's really nice. More Coastal influence than Secwepemc, but there's nothing wrong with it or him.

Reclaiming a Temporary and Transitional Perspective

The participants' comments revealed the temporary and transitional perspective, which is a wellness-promoting perspective that participants reclaimed, a life outlook that embraces an understanding that experience is temporary and everchanging. All experiences, emotions, and moments are just seasons that will pass, and nothing is permanent. Embracing this frame of reference toward life supports one's wellness. As one participant shared; "Being able to name what I'm feeling and sit with it, regardless of how uncomfortable that is, until it passes, because I know that it's going to pass, from the Buddhist teachings. Right? Everything will pass. Everything is transitory."

Reclaiming a Presence Perspective

The participants brought forward the idea of reclamation of a present orientation, which is to live in the moment. Participant M offered a narrative on the experience of doing a Vision Quest and how the process of a Vision Quest and Sundance, accompanied by the teaching from another dancer, solidified the importance of striving for a present orientation in life:

> Not having a clock means you can see how long a day actually is. We have a ceremony, the Vision Quest, that has opened my eyes to time in this world. Unless you have been on Vision Quest, I don't know how many people watch the sun come up until it sets. It made me see how long a day is; it's a long time. It gives you an appreciation for how much time we have on this earth. I was at a ceremony once, and one of the dancers asked the lead dancer, "Hey, what time is it?" The lead dancer looked back and said, "Time of your

> life; now get ready to dance." It doesn't matter, it is the time it is; you don't need to attach a number to it, it is now, and that is what matters. It's a call to attention to be present, and that's important for wellness. A lot of people are like zombies, unconscious and just going through life without question or awareness. You need awareness for and presence for wellness.

Reclaiming Spiritual Wellness

The participants actively reclaimed spiritual wellness, which is a belief in Spirit and a trust in something larger than oneself to promote one's personal and relational wellness. This is done through ceremonies that cultivate this belief and trust in Spirit.

Reclaiming the Belief in Spirit

Participants explained that the reclamation of spirituality is the experience that led to the belief in Spirit. Participant L spoke directly to recovering his Spirit through drumming, and noted that, once the reconnection was made, he was a transformed person:

> And, at the very beginning, I didn't know how to keep a drumbeat. I didn't know any songs. I felt really paranoid and very stressed out every time I did it. But I kept doing it because I knew that when I was doing it, it was helping me. I felt the connection, and it woke my Spirit up … So, I've seen many, many, I guess you could say, macho, tough guys or whatever, and they'll take them into ceremonies and do that kind of thing. I've seen guys really struggling, trying to find their Spirit, and I get to do a calling. When they find themselves in that moment, it is just like I did when I found myself in that moment and found my Spirit.

Reclaiming Trust in Something Larger than Oneself

Represented in the data was the view that trust in Spirit is a foundational trust that one's experiences have meaning, purpose, or teachings that each person is to uncover, and that will make them Wiser. Synchronicities are also intentional and promote one's wellbeing. Being grounded in trust in Spirit is living with awareness and conscious engagement of one's life, seeking guidance from the Spirit or universe, as Participant R described:

> One story I think of for Indigenous wellness—I don't know if it just speaks to Indigenous wellness, but I guess having that belief in universal energy or plant energy, I'm not sure what to call it. I always reflect back on a story when [*unnamed*] and I were bickering about something. Maybe Mercury was in retrograde or something. I don't know. And I called up my mom. I'm like, "Can you just watch the kids for a couple of hours? [*Unnamed*] and I are just going to go for a drive. Probably we just got to talk it out, or something." And we just got in the car, and we were just driving down the highway, and we took a turn. Now, we're going towards Squilax and keep going past, and now we're going towards Scotch Creek. And then, take a turn up because that's where we go to check on the berries, because it was about time … We were not talking that whole drive, and I was just thinking, like, "What am I going to say to him?" And, like, "Boy, we're just going to hash it out."
>
> … And then, we get to the berry patch where we pick and just get out and kind of, like, do that natural. He goes and checks up higher, and I check over this way and whatever, and it's just that natural—I don't know, when you're in that sync with your person, I guess. Pretty soon, we're talking, and just like, natural flow, and I think maybe at the

> same time, we both thought, "Was it even worth it, being mad?" I can't even tell you right now what I was mad at him for. But I remember that moment. I remember that when the anger—it wasn't enough to stay mad and hold a grudge. But we were there for a purpose. The purpose was to check whether the berries were still green. Are they going to ripen soon? Is there going to be a lot? And what else is around? And I just think it's that plant energy. It's that universal energy.

Participant S shared the story of synchronicity in her life and how synchronicities, in hindsight, have always supported her to become the person she intended to be:

> So, I finished there and wanted to work in my hometown as a nurse, but it wasn't working out. The doors weren't opening there for me for some reason. And then, people were telling me, "S, you should go get your Master's." And I'm like, "No, I don't want to go to school anymore. I've done too much school. I'm done with school." And finally, an Elder came up to me and said, "S, go get your Master's." And I'm like, "Okay."
>
> Yeah, as soon as I opened myself up to that, all the doors flew open. Yes, literally. I ended up getting a new vehicle. I ended up inquiring into a program … This particular program I wanted had a focus on community development and health promotion. That was my area and passion. And there was one in Winnipeg, and there was one in Saskatchewan. So, I went with the one in Saskatchewan, and they were really happy to have me … And I'm like, "Okay, now how do I find a place?" And I found out that there was housing for Native people over there. I inquired, and they found me one right away, big enough for my family. It was like [a] four-bedroom house with two bathrooms. And then I was like, "Okay, how am I going to get my stuff over there?" So, I asked this guy

> who was moving my stuff in the car. I said, "Would you consider driving us all the way over there?" He said, "Oh, no, that's too far." Well, about a couple of days later, the [guy] phone[s and] says, "Yeah, we'll take you." So, all the doors open when something's meant to be, right?

Reclaiming Ceremonies

The reclamation of ceremonies involves reclaiming practices, rituals, and ceremonies that promote connection to the Spirit and teach and remind people of how to live in a good way. The participants all practiced regular engagement with ceremonies to reconnect to Spirit (i.e., rituals, meditation, smudging, Elder consultations, mindfulness, cold bathing, and/or traditional Indigenous ceremonies). The ceremonies are unique to everyone, depending mainly on access and preference. Nonetheless, some sort of self-determined ceremony was present in each person's life. Participant M explained it in this way:

> The ceremonies connect us to Spirit, but it is more than that. They remind us how to conduct ourselves in the world; some people just go for the immediate dopamine hit or immediate effect, but they're about teaching us how to conduct ourselves every day to live in a good way. You honour yourself and everything in this world by trying to act in a way that improves your current situation and your current relationship with those things; they ground you.

Reclaiming Physical Wellness

Participants believed that engagement with physical activity was an essential aspect of wellness. Physical activity does not need to be formal exercise or sport; while there were

examples of that, it could also be living in alignment with traditional ways that promotes physical activity, as Participant M noted:

> [My role models] spend a lot of time outdoors. One of the things about ceremonies is that you are always in need of wood, and we need specific wood, so there is a lot of physical work with gathering and processing all the wood. Most of the people we hang out with are pretty young, and we enjoy fitness. I like to work out. But it's not like going to the gym; it's, like, the lifestyle, there is a lot of work to do.

Participant J shared what physical activity looks like for her:

> So, balance, for me, is also taking care of my physical health, getting out there and walking, hiking, making sure I'm getting enough fresh air, getting my feet on the ground. That's harder to do now that I've moved to a city, but I get out and walk. Physical movement is essential.

Phase Three Summary

Phase three, *reclaiming cultural wellness from colonization*, demonstrated the extent of the reclamation that Indigenous people must undertake to heal. The participants were striving to reclaim what they could through creative and resourceful efforts, piecing together what remains, and what can be found, sourced, and gathered, to heal and reclaim their Indigeneity and wellness in a colonial context where no blueprint exists. It is clear that reclamation does not mean returning to pre-colonial knowledge, culture, traditions, and life, exactly as they once were. All participants were actively recreating, reclaiming, and moving forward, sometimes embracing certain aspects of the contemporary colonial context (e.g., technology), with determination to heal and achieve wellness.

Wellness Experts Results Summary

Within this exploratory data set, the interview participants exposed the immense effort, resilience, and honourable pursuit required by Indigenous people for healing and wellness. It is apparent that Indigenous people are not starting from a place of wellness, and that significant and deep work is required for healing, including self-healing. The pursuit is an ordeal; often, from the first phase of disengaging from problematic substance use, challenges continue, albeit differently, as the phases progress. Individuals are then tasked with the messy and painful work of extracting colonization, which has saturated their being since birth and will continue to permeate their psyche and body, as they exist in the current colonial vacuum. Lastly, an individual is responsible for piecing back together their Indigeneity by reclaiming cultural wellness, which colonization stole, even though Indigenous people do not even know all that was stolen. It is a tremendous feat, incredibly inspiring and remarkable—the resilience and the extent of personal work and healing that Indigenous people engage in to reclaim wellness from the colonial trauma that they never asked for nor deserved.

The following chapter considers the results of the interviews conducted with wellness role models.

Chapter Five: Wellness Role Models Results

Building on Chapter Four, the wellness role model excerpts presented in this chapter are based on an additional set of data and results. The chapter begins by introducing the wellness role models. The reader is then guided into the report on the results and the healing process, and the outcome of the healing process is introduced; that is, living in wellness, which is living guided by Spirit. Each phase is introduced with a broad overview, then moves into the domains, themes, and examples from expert role models. Each phase closes with a summary. The first three phases align with the phases brought forward by the wellness experts, and these are followed by an additional phase specific to the wellness role models; exhibiting wellness living guided by Spirit.

Wellness Role Model Participants

Participant B

Participant B is from a First Nation on the west coast of Vancouver Island, BC. Her ancestral ties connect her to northern Washington state, the lower mainland of BC, and various communities of Vancouver Island. She has lived and worked throughout the province of BC, and currently resides in the BC interior. Her early education included attendance at an Indian Residential School and schools in Parksville and Lake Cowichan. She is a post-secondary graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in First Nations studies, and a Master of Arts in Indigenous governance.

Participant O

Participant O has heritage from two Indigenous Nations. O is 40 years old and has completed a Master's degree in social work. She has also taken courses in dialectical behaviour

therapy, and Indigenous wellness-focused trauma counselling. O is a co-founder of an Indigenous counselling service, she is a public health educator, and an adjunct professor. O was born in Mexico and lived there, prior to moving to Canada.

Participant P

Participant P is 60 years old and lives in Alkali. He is from a First Nation and is a certified addictions counsellor. He is semi-retired and runs his own company, which is focused on Indigenous healing. Prior to semi-retirement, P worked for his community and his Nation, supporting cultural healing and "addictions" work.

Participant T

Participant T is 67 years old and lives on the border of two First Nations. He is a member of a First Nations community and has lived in another for 52 years. T travels and resides in his home community where he has worked for 35 years as an addictions and mental wellness worker. T has been involved with Indian Residential School survivors for 27 years and has been a First Nations treatment center board member for 15 years. Participant T is a certified addictions counsellor. He is a committed hunter and fisherman and is a proponent of sports to promote wellness; he is still involved in many sports, like baseball. He maintains his involvement as a coach and volunteers with sports activities to support youth and their wellness.

Participant C

Participant C is from an unceded territory near Manitoulin Island. She belongs to the Water Snake Clan and is 56 years old. C is a health and wellness manager at an Indigenous health center that covers services on and off-reserve for Indigenous people. C enjoys taking on wellness projects, both in her work and in her free time, such as gardening and leading physical

and social activity groups. Participant C went back to school part-time and obtained her BA in Indigenous studies when she was 50, showing that it is never too late to realize a dream. Also, she co-published research on impacts of violence on learning, focusing on the impacts of residential schools on second and third generations. Her mantra is "Be scared, but do it anyway."

Participant I

Participant I is a member of a First Nation who has worked with the school district for many years to support Indigenous children. Participant I is well known in her community for her cultural Wisdom and is frequently asked to provide support in ceremonies, openings, and events with drumming. I and her family are avid drummers and enjoy playing stick games.

Participant E

Participant E is a First Nation's member located in BC. Her cultural upbringing was strong in the Catholic religion from her mother, aunts and grandmothers. All of them attended residential schools and experienced terrible abuse; however, they all believe that faith is not to blame, but that the "tools" used by the church system were wrong. Today, Participant E considers herself a prayer woman. She has followed what she has learned from the women in her family, and is firmly grounded in her prayers and always pays attention to her connection and relationship with the creator. In 1986, E was the first person from her community to graduate from high school. She has worked in the education system and health care system and is currently working with the RCMP.

Indigenous Healing Process and Living in Cultural Wellness

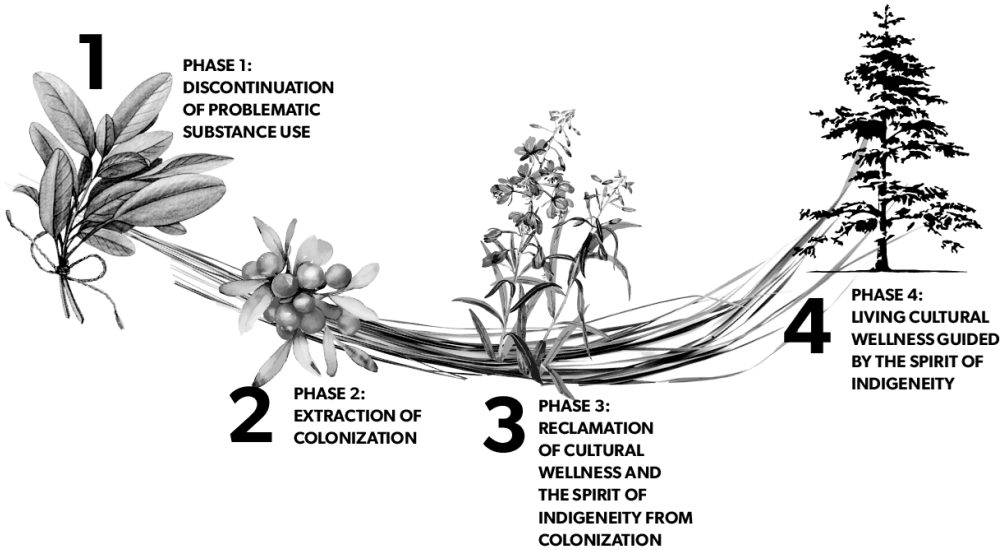
The wellness role models' interview questions were different from those of the wellness experts. The questions were aimed at acquiring descriptive examples of how the participants

lived in wellness and their daily lives. The reader will notice remarkable similarities in the phases I have been able to identify in the role model data set with those of the wellness experts—with the exception of an additional phase of *living in wellness*. There were also strands of the healing process intertwined within the data that were similar to those in the phases recognized and described by wellness experts.

All the wellness role models identified necessary phases or steps that provided the context for their outcomes and their present life of living in wellness. So, while the wellness experts provided more data in the healing phases, with a significant emphasis on the *reclamation* phase, the wellness role models demonstrated transcending the reclaiming phase to living in wellness, with the primary emphasis on the phase of the *pursuit of wellness* as an additional phase beyond what was offered by the wellness experts.

Figure 7

Illustration of the Healing Phases of Wellness Role Models



The table below offers a birds-eye view of the organization of the role models' results, and the phases, domains and themes that emerged from their data set.

Table 2

Overview of Wellness Role Models' Healing Process

Phases	Domains	Themes
Phase one: discontinuation of problematic substance use	Inherited discontinuation with problematic substances	
Phase two: extraction of colonization	Interpersonal-harmful relations	Calls for the individual to: Extract colonial boundaries Extract concept of Indigenous purity
	Intrapersonal-internalized colonization	Extract colonial shame Extract colonized victimization Extract harmful colonial religion
Phase three: Reclamation of cultural wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity from colonization	Culture	Calls for the individual to: Reclaim culture Reclaim culture's living process Reclaim cultural values Reclaim stories of resilience Reclaim truths about colonialism Reclaim the grief for the losses of colonization Reclaim colonial institutions
	Relational wellness	Calls for the individual to: Reclaim the Spirit of Indigenous names Reclaim the Spirit of family tradition Reclaim the Spirit of collective empowerment

		Reclaim the Spirit of wellness-promoting relations
Phase four: Living cultural wellness guided by the spirit of Indigeneity	Culture	Living guided by the Spirit of our Elders Embodying the Spirit of living in a good way Living the Spirit of wellness values
	Spirit of personal wellness	Spirit of Indigenous connection through culture, language, service, gathering and celebration
	Spirit of relational wellness	Spirit of kinship offered through: Spirit of a mother Spirit of a father Spirit of aunties and uncles Spirit of a grandmother Spirit of a grandfather Spirit of support is provided to the wellness role models through Encouragement, kindness, allyship, honesty Acceptance Compassionate listening Integrity Spirit of contribution is provided by the wellness role models in the form of healing and wellness, sharing wisdom, a wellness role model, and embodying an Elder Culture, activism

Phase One: Responses to Problematic Substance Use

Two types of discontinuation of problematic substance use emerged; 1) personal discontinuation of problematic substance use, where the participants disengaged with problematic substance use for coping and survival and 2) inherited discontinued substance use,

where the participants inherited the benefit of their parents or grandparents who did not engage with problematic substances. Half of the wellness role models articulated their initial action and step into healing, which was personally discontinuing problematic substance use, primarily alcohol. For two participants, in particular, disengaging with problematic substances was inspired by their children in their desire to answer the call to be the parent they did not have and to keep their children from being taken by the government. Participant I expressed her dedication and commitment to her role as a mother; to become the best mother required breaking the cycle. This participant shared her commitment to being there for her daughters in the spirit of role-modeling wellness, and for that, problematic coping with substances had to stop:

> In my life, my roles are a wife, a mother, a sister, and an Elder. Those roles—I don't want to say they're earned roles. Where I came from before, I was my mom and dad's daughter. I protected my girls only from the hurts that I received when I was a little girl … I loved my kids more when they were three. And I'd hold them tighter when they were three because I was removed from my mom at three, and I was that lost child. Not that I didn't love my girls, but I loved them more when they turned three. And that was my role, being their protector. And I promised myself that my girls weren't going to have the life that I had. I'm going to raise my kids. Nobody's going to take my kids. And it was later on in life when alcohol almost consumed me. And I sat one day, and I thought, "I'm breaking every promise I made to myself and to my girls. And I am giving them that life that I grew up [in], seeing my mom and dad drinking." So, I just quit cold turkey. No more. And I quit that. And so, I role-modeled that for them.

Participant P shared that the first thing he did to live in wellness was separate himself from harmful and problematic substances that he used to use for coping with colonial trauma, asking, “How do I live in wellness? … I’m still always trying to figure it out. But first of all, I don’t do alcohol or drugs; that was the first thing to go.”

Inherited Non-Engagement with Problematic Substances

The other wellness role models received the inherited gift of their Ancestors who did not engage with problematic substances. Participant E shared that, because her matriarchs did not engage with problematic substances, E herself had role models as the preparatory framework of spirituality and wellness:

> Well, the first thing about my wellness is my mom, grandmother, and aunts—they did not use drugs or alcohol. I don’t do drugs and alcohol. I have lived a healthy life that way just because I grew up with it. But my dad was an alcoholic, but did not raise me, so I just chose not to engage in that life. So, all my life, I’ve never been interested in it or—And so, that’s really, I think, the main thing for being healthy. Plus, I grew up with my mom, my grandmother, and my aunts, who were big prayer women, so prayer and spirituality are a big part of my life. They taught and modeled for me. So, I try to have the personality of my grandmother. So, I tried to be neutral always—-learned about honesty. Honesty is a big thing for me, from my mom and my grandparents—always to be honest and live an honest life. That’s something that I practice and believe in. No matter what it is, it’s just to always try to take the high road and be honest with everything, no matter what situation it is. And, yeah, I think spirituality and prayer are big things for me.

Phase One: Summary

All the participants shared one thing in common; between the present and previous generations, substances were used as problematic ways of coping with colonial trauma. The discontinuation of problematic substance use for coping was stopped by either themselves or a previous generation who broke the cycle. When the discontinuation of problematic substances is brought about, the necessary foundation of the broken cycle is laid to move through the process of healing to living in wellness.

Phase Two: Extraction of Colonization

Patterns in the data illustrate the *extraction of colonization*, an essential part of the process that the participants acknowledged as they followed the phases of healing to move toward wellness. This included forms of externalization, intrapersonal and interpersonal disconnection, and distancing from colonization that were experienced by the participants. Extracting colonization is exhibited in the actions to increase, extract, remove, and eliminate harmful experiences of colonization that block oneself and one's relations from healing and wellness. Participants demonstrated their intentional effort to separate and extract harmful effects of colonization and Western culture from themselves and their lives. Extracting colonization must happen across many life domains that permeate one's interpersonal and intrapersonal relations, including dimensions within the following; extracting harmful relationships, extracting colonial boundaries, extracting concept of Indigenous purity, extracting colonial shame, extracting colonized victimization, and extracting harmful and colonial religions.

Extracting Harmful Relationships

Participants acknowledged that it was imperative to keep oneself safe and separate from relations who do not yet act in ways that accord with wellness because of the impacts of colonization. Relationships that impeded the healing journey and detoured them from the pursuit of wellness were removed by participants. The data highlighted the fact that everyone is at their unique place along the spectrum of healing and wellness, and that many Indigenous people still suffer from severe colonial trauma and act out harmful colonial behaviour. For the participants to keep themselves safe, healing, and on the path to wellness, they needed to distance themselves from harmful relationships. The participants understood harmful behaviour as colonial behaviour and trauma response, which is a result of colonial harm they have endured; this perspective naturally separates the colonized behaviour from the person. From this perspective, there is no shame, but, rather, understanding.

Participant O demonstrated the recognition of colonial trauma that manifests itself as harmful behaviours. The perspective that views harmful and hurtful behaviour as colonial behaviour was helpful for O, as it allowed her to avoid moral judgement:

> It's an interesting place, because there are so many different layers of being Indigenous here. And there's a lot of inner lateral violence within the Indigenous communities because of colonization that is here because everyone has a lot of criticism, alienation, and judgement toward each other of who is right and wrong, and they can be so mean. You will hear people say, "Well, that's not how you do this, and this is how you do this." And I'm like, "Everyone's unhealthy. Let's all stop. This is all very, very unhealthy." So,

> I am careful about which places I engage in and who I relate to, because it can be draining and harmful.

Participant P noted that he had to remove some relationships in order to heal and live in wellness, which is an unfortunate but predictable outcome of historical and ongoing colonial trauma that causes people to act in harmful and colonized ways; "My family, my siblings, my brother and sister, we're not close. And the reason for that is residential school stuff and day school stuff and all that kind of stuff, and so we're not close, close. We're not brother-and-sister close. They are not on the same path as me."

Extracting Colonial Boundaries

The tension with colonial boundaries, and the arbitrary lines and boundaries that cut through Nations and lands were all exposed by the data. Conceptual boundaries remain examples of this, including the categories of "on or off reserve," "British Columbia," and "Canada." Participant T shared that he strives to transcend the colonial boundaries that reinforce Indigenous separation and do not reflect Indigenous nations. He stressed that pre-colonial Indigenous people are related to the land and their relations:

> I don't care about criteria we are told to adhere to, like on-reserve and off-reserve, whatever they consider. There are no limitations for me. I hate the word *off-reserve*. I hate that damn word—on or off reserve, we are still on our territory. That idea is the colonial proposition that puts lines in between people. And we then have no connection. And I still can't get that. I am supposed to serve on reserve, but I serve all our people. I got rid of that thinking. I can't comprehend why we think that way so much. You know

> what I mean. I don't. Even Canada or BC, those geographical lines, I work to not see them. We are in Secwepemc or Syilx territory.

Extracting the Concept of Indigenous Purity

One participant directly addressed, and others alluded to, the tension and division that blood quantum and cultural purity pose to Indigenous healing and wellness. Participant T explained his perspective of reality and challenged the concept of Indigenous nation purity. T contests the idea that any Indigenous persons, culture, or traditions in the contemporary colonial context are pure to one Nation, and we cannot judge one another for lacking any purity. It is simply reality. There is a widely held belief that there is a "pure" Indigenous culture that is distinct for each Nation and that is somehow superior and validates one's Indigeneity. In this context, and with the impacts of colonization, T argued that very few Indigenous persons or cultures are pure. The idea that any culture or person is pure to one Indigenous Nation is simply untrue or highly unlikely and an ideology that needs to be extracted when it is a force of division and shame, according to Participant T:

> Well, the thing is that—Okay, in our way, how do we do traditions, culture? We don't know, truly. It's all adapted and informed by other Indigenous cultures and colonization. There are some stories and, of course, language that align with each culture, so there is distinctness. Distinctness is okay when it's for good. But, more often, what I run into is that distinct nation culture or blood quantum is used to divide and conquer. Let's be honest. We don't know what our true culture was before colonization, no matter what anyone says. We are making our best guess. But we don't really know. And sooner or later, let's say 20 years from now, or maybe 30 years from now, it's going to be more of a

> struggle to see who is who and what is what culture. What Nation do you come from? Everyone is mixed between Nations and races. Well, I come from about ten Nations alone. So, well, who are you then? We need to be open and adapt to this reality. Our culture, traditions, and people are all mixed, and that's ok, but we have to release old ideas of *Indigenous* and look forward to what it means to be Indigenous in today's world. I am happy to get teachings from all Indigenous cultures, and many of them are mixed teachings to begin with. I don't judge; we are lucky to have anything left; who cares if it's pieced together? If it helps us, let's be thankful instead of judging, "That's not Secwepemc." Who cares? It survived [colonization], and we have it.

Extracting Colonial Shame

Colonial shame was explained as being inherently within oneself and was extracted by participants for their healing and wellness. Colonial shame is the poisoning of one's self-concept and esteem. It is the absorption of the colonial message about Indigenous people into one's psyche and body that something is inherently wrong with the Indigenous person as a human being. The participants all shared the inherently poisonous messages of Indigenous worthlessness that are the impetus for colonial shame. Participant I shared directly her experience of being ashamed of being Indigenous and that she had to remove colonial shame to be able to heal:

> I think, being Indigenous, you grow up ashamed of it. And when I graduated, there were just two of us [Indigenous students], but it wasn't like it is today. It was right up until I graduated that I thought, "Gee, I went to school acting like I was White." And I never, ever called myself First Nations or Indian. And we got made fun of all the time for being Native … And so, we were ashamed. And then when we got back up here [to the reserve]

> where we felt safe, so we would all hang around with one another. But when we got over there [off reserve], we stayed away from one another. And everybody knew. They called us Indians; "Indians are coming," because we had a blue and white bus. It wasn't a yellow bus … So, when I graduated, I still didn't really understand. But, even through the ball tournaments, you had to be Native. And, again, it was different because we were playing against other Native teams. And here they had a women's league. And we're all First Nations; the Chiefettes played teams in town. And we all got mocked by the umps and by the fans. And, after the one game, it went to a big brawl, and we all started fighting. And so, that was how it was. I grew up so ashamed, and I had to get rid of the shame; there is nothing worse than feeling bad about who you are.

Extracting Colonized Victimization

Participants brought forward the phenomenon of colonized victimization, which is an outcome of colonial trauma that renders one a victim to one's life and oneself and certainly is a roadblock to healing and wellness. Internalized victimization emerged as learned helplessness and disempowerment. Acting with colonial behaviour of learned helplessness and internalized victimization must be halted to experience necessary healing and achieve wellness. Participant T explained that living in wellness requires the purging of colonized behaviours that stem from colonial trauma. T affirmed that extracting colonial victimization makes space to reclaim Indigenous empowerment and self-determination:

> [Indigenous people] are always asking for money and someone to save us, but our cultural and traditional ways don't cost anything, and we can be self-sufficient in today's times, too, even though people think we cannot … We just have to believe that, for some

> reason, the dependency on the colonial system is getting more and [more] in the way. Dependency, to me, is that the system that we're in now creates dependency in all areas of life, and we don't realize that. We need to get rid of that behaviour and thinking, this victim mentality, and the idea that we need someone to save us.
>
> I see so many people with illness—I'll be 69 in two months. And I see younger people with health challenges and imbalance; I look at them, and I don't say anything. They're all just talking to Jesus, hoping to be saved. I think, "Is Jesus coming to save you from yourself? Why don't you do something about it?" You just wait. I think our people are used to waiting, and that's part of the dependency thinking that we learned because of colonization … Like, yesterday, I said, "It's our responsibility to keep ourselves healthy, nobody else." Money's not going to—All the money in the world's not going to save us, not the government, not Chief and Council, we need to do that ourselves, for ourselves, first.

Extracting Harmful Colonial Religion

The data showed that many participants had to address harmful colonial religion. Participants delineated, specifically, the colonial religious belief system and illustrated that colonial religion is rooted in shame, punitive discipline, and fear. Participants extracted harmful colonial religion so that they could relate to religion in the form of open spirituality that may be woven with colonial religion, such as Christianity, but the common thread across all the data was that the new spirituality was rooted in kindness, trust, non-judgement, and compassion. Participant T shared that he purged himself of colonial religion so he could find Indigenous spirituality:

> First, I had to find out what spirituality meant to me. I always thought spirituality was religion and all the horrible stuff with it. It's like, "Religion. I don't want any part of it. They beat the hell out of me, literally." The religion that I grew up on was so horrible. It was like, "Okay. Well, you cannot sin because you're going to end up in hell anyway. You're going to burn." But then, I found that spirituality is totally different from religion. And, in order to understand that, I had to move away from the religion and move over here to what we see, what we could see, nature and within it. As I went to our spiritual ways, I found that spirituality is kind. More gentle. There's no such thing as, "You burn in hell."

Phase Two: Summary

Extracting colonization from oneself was described as an intricate, complex, and necessary phase to separate colonization from one's psyche in order to be able to realize wellness. Participants were unable to negotiate a conversation regarding wellness without first covering some of the processes to get there, which included a common phase of colonial extractions.

Phase Three: Reclaiming Cultural Wellness From Colonization

Phase Three incorporates several main themes that arose from the data. These include the aim to:

- Reclaim culture
- Reclaim culture's living process
- Reclaim cultural values; i.e., balance, the Seven Values, living in a good way, Indigenous success, and Indigenous wealth

- Reclaim stories of resilience
- Reclaim truths about colonialism
- Reclaim the grief for the losses of colonization
- Reclaim colonial institutions

The data then are broken down into two subsections; *reclaiming the Spirit of relations* and *reclaiming the Spirit of self*. The relations have an interpersonal focus, and the self has an intrapersonal focus. Both have a myriad of subthemes, as outlined below.

The goal to reclaim the spirit of relational wellness aims to:

- Reclaim the Spirit of Indigenous names
- Reclaim the Spirit of family tradition
- Reclaim the Spirit of collective empowerment
- Reclaim the Spirit of wellness-promoting relations. These relations comprise the objectives to reclaim the Spirit of Elders, reclaim the Spirit of matriarchs, reclaim the Spirit of community, reclaim the Spirit of family, reclaim the Spirit of Indigenous role models, reclaim the connection to and Spirit of Indigenous lands.

Lastly, within the section is the objective to reclaim the Spirit of personal wellness. The major themes include the goals to:

- Reclaim the Spirit of identity
- Reclaim the Spirit of healing
- Reclaim the Spirit of emotional wellness, which includes the aim to reclaim peace, and reclaim vulnerability

- Reclaim the Spirit of mental wellness which comprises the goal to reclaim wellness-promoting perspectives, including a non-judgement perspective, a positive perspective, and an open-minded perspective
- Reclaim the Spirit of spiritual wellness
- Reclaim the Spirit of physical health, which involves reclaiming the Spirit of Indigenous Medicine

As I sifted through the role models' data, it became apparent that reclamation was an important aspect of the healing and wellness process. Participants appeared to engage in reclamation efforts to piece back parts of their Indigeneity that were stolen by colonization. When the participants spoke of reclamations, it was apparent they were courageous acts, not easy, and often unorthodox, as the wellness role models paved their own way to reclaim wellness, themselves, relations, and culture. The data revealed that participants were reclaiming what they had never had the opportunity to claim because of colonization.

Participants ascertained that Indigenous wellness was the baseline in pre-colonial times; cultural wellness was subsequently stolen by colonization. Indigenous wellness needs to be reclaimed and recreated in the contemporary colonial context.

Participant T differentiated Indigenous wellness from other Western concepts of wellness. Indigenous people are not striving for Western colonial wellness; Indigenous wellness is unique. It needs to be, and is being, reclaimed by individuals in the contemporary colonial context. As Participant T described it:

> Well, even when wellness becomes a way of life like it used to be, I think we have to specify something that I would like to say; Is it Indigenous? Is it Native? Wellness is

> good, but if we must put a word in front of it or behind it to make it our wellness—It's Indigenous. Yes. And it is not the same. And it is something we have to make for ourselves, it's new in this world now.

Reclaiming Culture

For many participants in this study, it became apparent that their Indigenous culture was not easily accessible. However, the data made it clear that they can still reclaim wellness through innovative, resourceful efforts; while it is not easy, and obstacles to access are real, participants noted ways in which they uncovered contemporary ways to access other Aboriginal cultures and Wise-teaching.[4] Several participants drew on a fusion of their Indigenous, Aboriginal, and other Wise-teachings worldwide as an effort to reclaim culture.

Participant P shared that he has had to be resourceful and seek out Indigenous cultural teachings and other ancient and new age teachings that have an embodied sense of consilience. Those braided together to contribute to his contemporary cultural Wisdom:

> I'm thinking about learning culture from many places; we need to. Some good teachings I've learned from Indigenous people, but I don't know which Indigenous. Some of it, I've learned from Buddhism, some of it I've learned from Christianity, some of it I've learned from different parts of just reading books about new age things, like positivity … One book was from a German lady. Then I saw similar teaching in the Big Book, which was

[4] The term *Aboriginal* is used intentionally here instead of *Indigenous* which is always connected to a specific land base. Teachings, culture, and people are always indigenous to somewhere distinct. In contrast, the term *Aboriginal* does not reference a land base but acknowledges one's Indigenous ancestry. Therefore, it cannot be said that a person has an Indigenous culture or Indigenous teachings unless the unique land is referenced; if the teaching is unknown, then it's considered not attached to a specific land base and is considered Aboriginal or Wise-teaching.

written by a non-Native guy, Bill W., from the AA program. You need to find what is useful and aligns with our core cultural teachings and if it feels true.

Participant I shared that she is inspired by new age spirituality that reinforces her Indigenous spirituality and identity with consilient and aligned messages:

> Sylvia Brown always comes to mind; she is Wise. I am inspired by her. I went to see her, and I did buy one of her books. Well, she's passed on, but she's a psychic. Those are the kinds of books I read; they are usually spiritual and holistic. I read a lot of spiritual books, and I am spiritually entwined and hereditary, which comes from my mom's side of the family. It makes sense that I seek out and resonate with these things.

Reclaiming Culture's Living Process

The participants revealed the reclamation and reinstatement of culture and its own life and process, akin to cultural evolution. Participants advocated the necessity of adapting and integrating changes to traditional culture to reflect the current contemporary contexts so that the culture can survive the ever-changing contexts across time for generations.

Participant B indicated that traditional Indigenous stories can be adapted to support learning and the integration of traditional and cultural Indigenous teachings, relevant to the contemporary world, by adapting and reflecting the contemporary context within them. In this sense, contemporary Indigenous stories are reclaimed as a teaching source, reflecting the natural process of cultural evolution. Participant B observed:

> Some people say you can't translate our stories into English. That's what they say. But I say, you can give it a go. The thing with oral stories and history is the power of the place and how you describe some of the stories. Some are very physical, with action, hand

> motions, and body motions. Even the intention of the storytelling matters. But I have seen, and I have also been, a storyteller who brings in contemporary things and inserts that into the story so people can benefit from the story and make the connection that way.

Participants advocated for reclaiming culture that reflects the contemporary colonial context through cultural adaptation, which is bringing forward pre-colonial cultural values and Wisdom into contemporary life, while maintaining the integrity of the roots of pre-colonial culture, but adapting the way that it is expressed in the current colonial context. Participant T articulated the importance of separating from the familiar, Western approach, and the need to reclaim pre-colonial Indigenous Wisdom while making the necessary adaptations to provide the same gifts it did to the Ancestors, including wellness:

> The ones in our prime leadership position right now are looking back [to pre-colonial times] and forward [at contemporary colonial times], and that's why we're going further now, the ones who change and see things differently—Adapting our old ways and bringing them into our work and lives, then we will see healing and wellness. And yet, so many in this work still rely on the mainstream [Western] ways, and, at a conference I was just at, I heard them having the same discussions about the same things with the same [Western] approach. And then, I was thinking, "Hey, you guys are going the wrong way. You guys hear me?" But they still go that way because that's what they believe, or it is familiar. But we need a new path that is guided by our old ways in this new life.

Other participants noted that, in the face of the theft of traditional Indigenous culture, reclaiming culture requires resourcefulness, adaptation, and embracing the gifts of other ancient traditions in a contemporary global context. Participant B shared that she seeks consilient

teachings that align with Indigenous culture from other ancient traditions to promote wellness, a clever way to adapt and bring in Wisdom and promote cultural wellness:

> Learning my culture is hard because a lot of it is gone, and we don't know what was necessarily lost. So, one thing I do is—it helps me to study other cultures, and it brings me "aha" moments, especially when it's things that I have heard in our stories or teaching, and then it shows up in other cultures or philosophies. I did a lot of reading when I was younger, and I retained some of the things that stood out for me. But today, I use YouTube a lot … Well, I don't recall the names of the people, but I was geared towards Eastern philosophy. And it's just kind of—It connects because of some of the scenarios that make sense, because I can reflect on my own stories … To me, it seems enlightening when I watch movies based on people like Gandhi or the Himalayans in isolation, too, and view the world. And it kind of brings you back to Earth, and it feels connected to what our [Indigenous] teachings would have also said.

Reclaiming Cultural Values

Fundamental values that were reclaimed to pursue wellness were illuminated within the data. Participants noted balance as the foundation framework, with embedded values to guide their lives, like the Seven Values and Wise mottos. Furthermore, the reclaiming of cultural values also means redefining foundational life concepts of Indigenous success and wealth, rooted in Indigenous cultural values.

Reclaiming Balance

The participants raised the imperative value of, and emphasis on, reclaiming balance. Personal balance describes the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual, while relational

balance includes balancing all one's relations. Participants described balance as the practice of naturally evaluating the balance of the strength in one's life, which promotes wellness. Balance is the effort of reclaiming the practice and lifestyle which promotes continuous engagement in wellness and a balance of personal and relational forces. All participants noted that balance is a model for understanding Indigenous wellness. Balance requires self-inquiry and embodied living so that one can hear what aspects of self—mental, emotional, and physical—require attention and care. Participant I explained the importance of self-inquiring to check on balance. In the following example, she demonstrated mental and emotional inquiry in her approach to regaining balance:

> I learned to check in with what's going on so I can keep myself balanced, mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually, with myself and others … If I feel that I'm off balance, I will say, "What's going on?" … So, I have to remind myself. When I got out of bed, what did I do? And if I didn't do my prayer or I didn't do my meditation—So, things like that. So, I set myself up for balance.

Reclaiming the Seven Values

The participants pointed to well-known seven foundational values, often understood as Indigenous cultural values that are believed to have guided and promoted *living a good life* in pre-colonial times. When reclaimed, these values promote wellness. The values are humility, courage, respect, love, honesty/truth, learning/teaching and living it, wisdom-lived, and balance, consistent with commonly held models of the Seven Teachings. Participant T shared his experience of reclaiming these values:

> I learned about the Seven Values. There was a poster on the wall at Round Lake Treatment Center. As I practiced them, the way I walked, the way I talked, and the way I thought changed as I lived by the Seven Laws. I had to learn to introduce them into my life in the 21st century and apply them to how to deal with the issues that my Ancestors didn't have. And it's tough, but you can actually do it. One of the basic things that I'll say is that the Seven Laws, whatever it is, you could introduce to yourself the person that you are now in the 21st century, and you almost become like our Ancestors. That's the goal. You just got to stick by them. There's distractions, but you can learn the basic values and the basic skills that our people had. They're simple. Because most of us will—To heal, to rebuild a family, to live in wellness, you pretty well have to do that.
>
> That's what I always say; wellness is simplifying, what is being healthy and living the Seven Values. If we teach our grandchildren or our children the Seven Values down the line, they'd be well—well, instead of buying and buying and buying and shit.

Other values that emerged came from the motto offered by Participant C, "walking gently," which refers to the values of reciprocity, kindness, and compassion, and from the teaching Participant I received on positivity; to do no harm and strive only for good. Those values are integrated into contemporary life, and one continuously molds one's life, adapting to the contemporary context to live with the integrity of these values. Within the overarching Seven Traditional Values, further sub-values that appear throughout the data were illuminated, and are listed below.

Humility. Pride, anti-consumerism, objectivity, self-awareness, self-inquiry, mindfulness, and connection to land

Courage. Empowerment, trust, solitude, acceptance, non-permanence, and trauma healing

Respect. Collaboration, equity, intentionality, self-determination/agency, organization, clean, boundaries, discipline, diverse perspectives

Love. Kindness, compassion, gratitude, sharing, inclusivity, advocacy, passion, strength-based, positivity, encouragement, hope, do no harm

Honesty/Truth. Consilience, authenticity, transparency, presence, genuine

Wisdom. Open-minded, educated, personal growth, teaching/sharing, intentionality

Balance. Moderation, simplicity, novelty, play, routine, humour, diversity, interdependence, wholeness, resourcefulness, living slowly, traditional and contemporary ways

Reclaiming the Spirit of Living in a Good Way

The participants offered mottos that guided their lives. Mottos have embedded values that ground them in their values to guide their lives when referenced back by individuals. Mottos emerged from the participants as an important tool to reground oneself in living wellness. Participants I, T, C, P, and O all referenced similar mottos that guide their lives in wellness; *living in a good way* or *walking in a good way*. This motto means to live guided by the seven Indigenous values or laws, referenced above, and to do no harm, live with humility, and act with compassion and kindness.

Participant O shared that she lives guided by simple mantras that can inspire nearly every moment and, in doing so, support one in living in wellness. The mantras are to *walk in a good way, walk gently,* and *be humble.* Participant O maintained:

> I have a life theory; Walk in a good way. I learned that at university. It reminds me that all interactions and engagements with anyone and everyone I'm lucky enough to cross

> paths with must be reciprocal. It needs to be two-way. Right? It's not just me getting something from that person. It's giving and taking. And, in that, wellness happens. You give and take in a good way; do no harm. And so that's kind of how I've—It's just kind of become my mantra. There are a few things that are my mantra. One is to walk in a good way and walk gently, which is also kindness and compassion. The other one is to understand humility. *Be humble*. Just have humility in absolutely everything that you do and figure out what that's supposed to look like. And that's tricky, but that's kind of what I think of. Those are the two main things when I think of my own wellness.

Participant T shared that he had to seek teachings to learn how to live in a good way. *Living in a good way* was not a privilege or gift bestowed on him; he had to deliberately seek out these teachings and be incredibly resourceful to acquire them and integrate them into his life, in order to heal and reclaim wellness. Participant T noted:

> And that's where I had to learn what it meant to live in a good way. That's from the Native teaching, those Seven Teachings, and others I have come across. Everything that I say now, I say in a good way. Never a tough mouth. Just in a good way. *A good way*, to me, is that you don't intentionally offend anybody, and you don't disrespect—and you need to be genuine. I haven't always lived this way, but I had to shift that way. I had to learn what was good, in a good way; it was not easy.

Participant I explained that she received that teaching from her grandmother. She said that the motto means to act positively toward others, do no harm, and do only for good:

> As I healed, I remembered a teaching. It is about positivity and never saying harmful things to people, even though they have said those to you. And when I do seminars or

> conferences, I would just say—I share with them what my grandmother told me. And she'd say, "The Creator gave you mouth to speak, not bad words to people. He gave you that voice to share good things and not say bad things to people. He gave you the ears just to listen to the good things that the people are saying. He didn't give you the ears to listen to all the bad things, because everybody in this world has something bad, but we don't want to hear that. We want to hear the goodness in all people. And he gave us the eyes to see the goodness in that person. Never gave us eyes to show evil looks at anybody." So, she says, "You remember those things. He gave us fingers, and he gave us feet. Our hands are to create things and make them work for good. Your feet are to get you from here to there. So, without all those, you'd be just this little stump."

Reclaiming Indigenous Success

The participants reclaimed Indigenous success by redefining it as something that aligns with Indigenous values. Participants spoke about an aspect of Indigenous success as Indigenous people who are striving to reclaim and live in wellness in the contemporary colonial context. Participant T shared that he sees Indigenous people who are healing and striving for wellness as contemporary Warriors, people who have successfully reclaimed empowerment and integrated the strengths and gifts of Western colonial contemporary life with their culture, identity, and wellness:

> I've kind of learned, sat back, and observed. My son and his peers bought houses off-reserve. I said, "Hey," I said, "That's a new Warrior." As long as you know your culture, hunting, and traditional ways and are living in a good way, that's the best way. I said, "We should all be doing that."

> You know what I mean? As long as you know your culture and traditional ways, but can get along in the White man's world, that's a new Warrior nowadays, because that is not easy to do. Not reliant on the reserve. Even though people will judge them and say, "Well, they are assimilated." But no, it's growth and adapting; they know their roots, so that is a success.

Reclaiming Indigenous Wealth

Participants also reclaimed and redefined Indigenous wealth based on Indigenous values that are antithetical to Western wealth. It was described as having Wisdom, culture, teachings, Indigenous values, connection to healthy nature and Indigenous land, health, Indigenous belonging, connection to all one's relations, and the ability to contribute to Indigenous people. Participant E outlined the reclamation of her grandparents' pre-colonial values, which meant devaluing Western values of wealth accumulation:

> We're so influenced by money and power. We're so influenced by that, that it's hard to see the grace and beauty that we're supposed to acknowledge and walk with every day [in the way] that our grandparents did. Nature and family. Yeah. They were never very concerned about money and having status or growing wealth; they didn't care about that. I am working toward that.

Participant T similarly shared that he has redefined the Western ideas of "wealth" to reflect Indigenous values. T opined that wealth means reclaiming the definition from an Indigenous perspective. Wealth and success are no longer about one's amount of money, but rather about sharing one's Wisdom, culture, teachings, and Indigenous values with Indigenous relations, connecting to nature, and having an abundant mindset, which is Indigenous wealth:

> In this day and age, we need to adapt and change what doesn't work for us. If you don't adapt, you stay behind. For example, one of the band members asked, "Why aren't we rich?" I said, "It depends on what you call 'rich.'" He said, "What do you mean? Do you have lots of money?" I said, "No. I've got enough to live on." "Well, it seems to me you got more than what I have." I said, "No. You've got what I have, too, if you want to." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, if you have the Seven Laws or the Seven Values, the land, Spirit, you've got more than any other people on this Earth." I said, "That's value." And he said, "Okay. I got to make sure I got to find one of those." I said, "You got to teach yourself and your children, your grandchildren. As long as you got them seven things, hey, you got more than anybody else in this world." It doesn't cost money either. That's what I consider rich.

Reclaiming Stories of Resilience

Participants emphasized the importance of balancing stories about trauma and suffering with stories of Indigenous resilience. Participant O offered her family's story as an example. The repetition of the story throughout her life allowed her to remember more details and begin to visualize the narratives she drew on for inspiration. O shared how understanding her family's traumatic history was important, but that it was also important to focus on their resilience. From the stories of struggle and trauma, Participant O reclaimed the strength and love that she hears in the stories:

> My mom shares stories endlessly … I can visualize her in those situations. And she would tell me my birthing story and all these little tidbits of little stories; all of it is so important to me now. Now, I'm like, "I get it." And I get how important it is to carry

> these forward. I don't have any kids, but I see myself in her stories. I see myself in how she speaks about my grandmother and her struggles, because my grandmother was 12 when she was married to my grandfather, who was in his 20s … She was like, "Our family is this example of how 14 of us were all living under the same roof in dire poverty with someone who was chronically abusive to all of us." And yet, she's like, "All of your aunties and uncles are loving, and all of your aunties and uncles don't do any of that to their kids. And we are this powerhouse family. And that's your grandma." Her energy was able to, kind of, save all of her kids and all of the grandkids. And so, those stories you—you realize that's pretty crazy. That resilience, I focus on that. And then, my grandpa got shot and killed on a hunting trip when my mom was 16 years old. And then, it's just my grandma alone with 13 kids. And it's all of those crazy stories, the strength in the stories, those are my identity. The teachings are there. They're just subtle. They're not loud; they remind me of the generational strength.

Reclaiming the History of Colonialism

The participants called out the privileged colonial narrative that serves and maintains White "settlers'" supremacy woven into "Indigenous shame," which must be taught to be seen, unlearned, and re-taught with truth to Indigenous people. Indigenous people cannot change what they experienced and experience in regard to colonial trauma; denying, ignoring, and being unaware of the extent of colonial poisoning and harm will not move Indigenous people forward in healing and wellness. Reclaiming colonial truths and their impacts is necessary for healing and wellness. Until Indigenous people see that they are impacted by colonial trauma, they are living with a colonial veil and are not able to reclaim themselves or their wellness. Post-colonially,

reclaiming a vision of the true context of colonial trauma is empowering. It is necessary to see oneself and other Indigenous people as inextricable from the colonial trauma context, historically and presently. Participant T shared that, to be able to move forward on healing and wellness, Indigenous people, as a whole, need to see with clarity where Indigenous people are at in terms of the trauma phases and process, without blame or shame:

> It seems to me, Indigenous people are in the process of just waking up and still believe and only know what we have been told; some are healing, but still, it's very few. Right now, I said, "Well, many of us are either still using substances of sorts to cope with all the pain or kind of in a dry drunk stage." They are still in trauma. I think so, but no one wants to say it. And it's not our fault. We have to remember that, but we have a responsibility to change. Everybody who is healthy and has healed knows that word. They know what I mean. They see people living in the trauma. They know what I mean. I don't mean it in a bad way. It's just that few are healing and living in wellness, but most are not. It is just where we are at as people, because we, as a people, do not know the truth about all the trauma. Our people do not realize they are acting from the trauma; many of the people still think it's their bad, and carry that shame, but once you see the traumas, you can take away the blame we carry and move toward healing.

Reclaiming the Grief for the Losses to Colonization

The unprocessed loss and grief process that is still required for many Indigenous people was uncovered by the data. The losses of colonization have not yet been fully realized, as noted by the wellness experts and the role models for the call to *reclaim the history of colonialism*. As Indigenous people continue to uncover the painful truths of colonialism, there comes inherent

grief, as the data has demonstrated, with an example from Participant B. As the truths come to light about the impacts of colonization, reclaiming grief is imperative to process the pain, to heal, and to reclaim wellness. Participant B described her experience as she realized the magnitude of the poisoning of culture that will not be reclaimed and needs to be grieved. The reclamation, in this instance, is not culture; not all of it can be reclaimed, but it is the reclamation of the necessary grief:

> When I was a student at UVIC, I considered doing a culture and language project. The theme of that thesis was coyote stories, in government. That was because I had some stories that I wanted to translate at that time into—the best I could in my language. I still don't know my language. I know just, like, introductory, like numbers, just primary level language. But my goal at that time was to interview my father because he's the one who told me these stories. And, if he'd be willing, I could record him speaking the story to me in the language because he said that it comes across better and more in-depth. So, I found that intriguing, so I asked him to do that, and he was willing to help. So, I pressed the record, and then, what came out of his mouth was just English. After I tried four times, he couldn't do it. And I thought, that's got to be the magnitude of the residential school experience. He just could not get it out of his mouth; some things are truly gone. It is gone forever, and that is symbolic of genocide. I grieved that.

Reclaiming Colonial Institutions

The data revealed that many colonial institutions are being reclaimed as a source of wellness and access to culture. Health centers, community governance, and colonial organizations, such as treatment centers and education institutions, are being reclaimed as

sources of culture and wellness. Indigenous communities have creatively used colonial systems and structures to promote Indigenous wellness and reclaim Indigenous culture and these are a source for Indigenous wellness in a contemporary colonial context, as Participant C articulated:

> The health center, we have a healing lodge in our office. So, wellness is sitting around the fire and we put some Medicines in it. We burn some Medicines in the fire as an offering to the Creator. And, on Manitoulin Island, they actually call it *Mino-bimaadiziwin*. And that means "the good life." And that's what reflects back is part of the day is doing some self-care activities. So, for me, it's very important.

Participant I noted that the health centre in her community has been reclaimed as a community hub that promotes wellness and is a source of community culture by offering culturally appropriate health services, supporting wellness promotion, and being a source of culture, such as ceremonies:

> I believe that this health centre is a source of wellness; we do a lot of things as a community with the health department. Just this past year, I would say, we do lots of cultural things. They have formed a women's group and a men's group, and children and families come in. They work with the health centre and the social wellness building department but do lots of culture with the kids. So, they open their doors and ask, "What do you want us to do?" or, "What do you want to see from us?" Then, the health center, right in the middle of our village, just stands out, and they do ceremonies and offer cultural and holistic healing.

Another example of colonial institutions being reclaimed was found in educational institutions, some of which became a source of Indigenous connection and belonging. For

Participant O, post-secondary education initially felt exclusionary, but one institution reclaimed Indigenous culture and belonging and became a source of connection to Indigenous Elders, mentors, culture, and wellness:

> I started my schooling at SFU. I had my first degree in Anthropology and Forensic Anthro. And I left that degree because it overlapped with the discovery of all the women on the Pickton farm. I was very young, and I was in this third-year degree program, and they utilized a lot of the students to do the labelling. And I started to realize how disconnecting it is to be doing one side of this giant situation; it was very Western. And I lived and grew up in the Downtown Eastside. So, I had a connection to my community in a really unique way that I didn't feel was being represented very well academically at that time. So, I left that. I left that full degree. I bailed on school and was like, "Well, I guess that's not for me; I do not belong." Then, I came to the Downtown Eastside and started doing support work for a couple of years. And it was an Indigenous woman who was like, "Hey, there's this school you need. I don't care what is happening right now, but you need to go check it out." And she kind of led me to NVIT. As soon as I got there, it was like finding an Indigenous community and finding support and feeling safe in academia, which was not something that I thought could be linked, and, at this school, it was.
>
> School connected me to culture and Elders. I met a woman long ago who taught me really important things. She was Anishinaabe. She was an Elder who was also a teacher at one of my universities. I was lucky enough to go to an Indigenous-based Bachelor's-level university here in Vancouver that I found. That was amazing.

Reclaiming the Spirit of Relational Wellness

It became apparent, through the data, that there was a reclamation of relational wellness. With the wellness experts, I named this theme *reclaiming relational wellness*, by which the participants made clear that the understanding of relational wellness included all one's relations, as well as land, family, and cultural roles. However, what emerged was that the participants were speaking of the *essence*, the idea of the relation being reclaimed. Sometimes, the reclamation of a relationship was imaginative and spiritual. What arose was that, when one is reclaiming their relations, it's the Spirit, the goodness, the wellness-promoting aspect of the relation, and not necessarily the concrete Western defined relation; it was the Spirit that went past the concrete and invited the abstract energetic relationship to be reclaimed in their life. Therefore, it's the Spirit of one's relations that is reclaimed. This was the first time in the analysis that I recognized it was the Spirit of something being reclaimed.

The participants brought forward the Spirit of one's relations as a source of wellness. The data exposed that one's relations are not just one's relations as a person in this lifetime, but also that the relations included nature, and animals, and time, for example, generations. Furthermore, *relations* exceeded the concrete definitions of what colonially is understood to be one's relatives, such as an aunt, mother, or sibling. Rather, the participants reclaimed and redefined their relations and described their relations as playing the essence of that relational role in their life, or as I understood, the Spirit of the role and their relations. Relational contributors describe the engagement and orientation with all one's relations external to the self. Relational contributors promote and support healing and wellness, both in the ways individuals relate to others through

belonging, and through the reclamation of roles like that of an Elder, and also how others, such as role models, relate to them. Relational contributors include all one's relations.

Reclaiming the Spirit of Indigenous Names

One participant illustrated the Spirit within the names as a source of vital Indigeneity. An Indigenous name can solidify the sense of Indigenous belonging and identity. Names are a privilege and require connection and belonging to Indigenous relations, but, for those who have these connections, names can be empowering sources of identity and belonging, as Participant I explained:

> My mom's family is from Lytton, but my granny was spiritually connected to the land. And so, we came from the Bear people. Not very many tribes have clans, and not many people have gotten to know or are even connected to their relations to know this. But I am lucky to know this part of our history. My granny did not call us a clan. She calls us the Bear people. So, when I was a young girl, I occasionally encountered a bear I didn't know was there. And I would be walking. And then, it would be a bear that was just looking at me. So later, as I got older, my granny—telling my uncles because she never spoke—I never heard her speak English. But she told my mom and my uncles she would be walking She-bear, so, until I learned the St'at'imc language, I could not take ownership of my traditional identity. And I'm 65. But I received that name when I was probably—I want to say five. I was young, but didn't embrace it until I learned the language. So, my brother remembers that. So, I love to live my life traditionally. I drum, and I sing. I never danced. But I love to do traditional things.

Reclaiming the Spirit of Family Tradition

There was a reclamation of Spirit within ancestral and generational traditions by participants. Participants addressed the fact that many families' stories, artifacts, and history may not be reclaimable and that it is important to reclaim what is salvageable. Participant B shared that she reconnected to her family's paddle, which carried history, teaching, culture, and connection to her Indigeneity:

> My grandfather used whatever was available to him to help the community. So, that paddle is part of a dance, a paddle dance. And so, my grandfather made that. And, when he passed, and whoever moved in his house after that passed, that was, like, one of the things that was left behind in that house. It looked, to a lot of people, I guess, as not valuable, but to me, it was very valuable because it came from the workings of my late grandfather. It shows me that he promoted and assisted in keeping those songs and dances alive and serving our people with what we have available. And my intention is to pass that on to my daughter, who composed the song, On the Lake Where I Came From. It's a very powerful song. She uses it in Tribal Journeys as a woman's paddle song. And the reason she calls it that is it came after we got the paddle. For some reason, men cannot get the hang of the song, whereas women will pick up on it rather quickly. So, it became one woman's paddle song. That connection, to me, is another intervention of creativity, spirituality, and a strong cultural connection to place and family.

Reclaiming the Spirit of Collective Empowerment

Participants spoke to the need for reclaiming the Spirit of collective Indigenous empowerment, the essence and belief that, as a group, Indigenous people have the answers

within themselves for healing and wellness. Participant T articulated the need for Indigenous people, on the whole, to reclaim their empowerment. T contended that reclaiming empowerment means that Indigenous people will seek answers and solutions to heal and live in wellness within their Indigeneity and not look to Western solutions, which created the current colonial problems:

> You've got to think outside the normal [Western or colonial] box. The box is no good for you … I said, "We've got the circle. We've got the answers. It's just that we don't believe it yet." I said, "The system has got us thinking that somebody else has got the answer for us." I said, "We've got to quit thinking like that. We're strong and intelligent people." Other people are coming to us now looking for answers because they've lost their way. And we're looking to the people who took everything to save us. Well, I can tell you they will not take us down the right path … We need to take our thinking and belief in ourselves back and make our own path as individuals, communities, and Nations for health and wellness.

Reclaiming the Spirit of Wellness-Promoting Relations

Indigenous healing requires reclaiming relations in creative ways, which is supported by the contemporary context and challenges of colonial trauma. What will be described in detail below are the wellness-promoting relations that emerged, including the Spirit Elders, matriarchs, community, family, role models, and Indigenous lands.

Reclaiming the Spirit of Elders

Participants were able to reconnect to the Elder's Wise-teachings and Spirit. One participant, Participant I, found that the more actively engaged they were with culture and living wellness, the more spiritual access they had to the Elder's voice and Wise-teachings:

> When I sobered up, my girls powwow-danced. We did a lot of travelling to powwows. I learned a lot about the culture there. And then, I learned and spoke to other cultural workers and advisors I met and began practicing what I was learning. The more I practiced, the more my grandmother's words came to me when I was a little girl; "Oh, yeah. I remember my grandma saying that." I was reconnected to my grandmother's voice and Wisdom through culture. I still have those teachings now.

One participant mentioned directly, while others alluded to, the need to embrace the Spirit of an Elder for themselves, to reclaim cultural roles, such as an Elder, despite the discomfort that can emerge within oneself. It is a courageous act to embrace cultural roles like that of an Elder. Participant P maintained that he has reclaimed his role as father and grandfather and that he is hesitantly reclaiming and accepting his cultural and spiritual leadership role, which he understands as that of an Elder. P noted that people are seeking him out for his cultural strengths and gifts, so it is a calling to step into one's role and accept the responsibility:

> I'm a dad. I'm a grandfather. We can take on these roles again; those roles were not possible with residential schools. And I am strong in those roles now. Also, I don't know—I hate to use the word, but it's a Spiritual Leader. People have been coming to me for spiritual stuff, and it's been happening a lot … I also teach traditional and cultural ceremonies. And it's been strange that way, because I don't see myself as that or an Elder, but people have been calling me to offer that and see me that way. And so, I've been doing it. And so, it's been really, I guess, challenging myself to be able to accept that role or that responsibility.

Reclaiming the Spirit Matriarchs

There appeared to be a *reclamation of the Spirit of matriarchy*, which means reclaiming women's leadership roles and holding power for families, communities, and Nations. Participant I shared that she witnessed the reclamation of matriarchs all around her, which is a sign of healing. The reclamation of matriarchy brings back joy and pride in seeing women step back into leadership roles that promote wellness:

> Today, it's different. With healing, comes women returning to their leadership matriarchy roles, which will bring wellness. We look all over the world; we look at different communities. We have female leaders now. We have females that are running a health center. Females that are going to go and get their doctorate. Female chiefs. Females returning to being the head of their family. That didn't happen during the depths of colonization. So, the Indigenous females are leading the way, and I always just smile when I see that.

Reclaiming the Spirit of Community

The desire for, and effort of, participants to *create a community* was gleaned from the data. The Spirit of community is a self-created community that supports one's wellness and sense of Indigenous connection and belonging. Participant O suggested that there is a need to reclaim and re-create a self-determined community in this modern context. O observed that a community is not necessarily where one lives or where one is from, but comprises people who are considered to be like family and includes family who live all over the world. Her definition of a community is people you stay in touch with, and maintain knowledge of what is going on in one another's lives from a place of care:

> My community supports my wellness and gives me connection, care, and belonging. For me, community is knowing your community members, no matter where they are in the world. And they are family in the same way that, if one of them kind of disappeared for a week too long, you'd immediately be like, "Huh. What's going on there? I need to check in." It's the same thing as being in a small community. Right? You know what's going on with people. You know what's happening with your cousins and nieces and nephews. And you can support better when you know what's going on. Just now, your community may be all over the world, some family, some not.

Participant P demonstrated his resourcefulness in reclaiming what an Indigenous community is for him in the contemporary context. P acknowledged the trauma wounds in the community, which is a barrier to having close relationships. He explained how he has reclaimed and recreated his own wellness-promoting community:

> My community does their best to help me, I guess. But, at the same time, my community is kind of far behind in healing. Some of them are doing well, and, every once in a while, they create a spark that will unite and get people moving again. We just did a residential school healing workshop in Prince George, where they ship all the people that went to the residential school to Prince George; we had a workshop there. And then, it kind of forced us to start talking about what happened to us at residential school. They separated men and women and then brought us together, and separated us, brought us together. So, then, the conversation started. And so, that is like my community. They are doing the best that they can with what they know, but there are a lot of traumas that make it hard [to

> connect]. So, I created my own community of friends and peers, but they are not all from my First Nation community; most are not, they are from everywhere.

Reclaiming the Spirit of Family

The participants demonstrated the reclamation of the Spirit of family which means taking back both the literal concept of and the essence of the Spirit of family that supports one's wellness, connection, and belonging. Reclaiming family can mean finding people who can fulfill familial roles to support healing and wellness; in a contemporary context, a family can be made up of blood or chosen relatives. Some participants' experience demonstrated that, within a contemporary colonial context, family is now not accessible, healthy, or safe. While all participants noted the importance of family, not everyone has access to a healthy, well, and supported family because of the multitude of colonial traumas.

Participant I shared that, as she and her husband have chosen healing, they have reclaimed their literal family. I's family is the first since residential school to be strong, unified, healing, and living in wellness. They share teachings, celebrate, engage with humour, work together, and practice culture as a family. For Participant I, they are her wellness:

> My family, they're my foundation. Without family, I don't think I would be where I'm at today. We're really strong as a family unit. We are the first in our family to be a well-connected family again. We do things together as a family. And we believe that gathering is the strength because—I don't know if you've ever heard us as a family when we drum and we sing. There's always humour, but there's always emotions. If one's down, we're all going to help that person. But both I know, and they're very emotional parents when it comes to our kids. We sit together, work together, and be happy.

Participant T demonstrated how reclaiming family was done by making connections with peers and friends through various contemporary communities of shared interests, who become family. T claimed that many of his family members are impacted by colonial trauma and remain living trauma-determined lives. Participant T needed to create his own family that reflected wellness:

> I am connected to family. My real family, no, because we are different. Of all the teachings they have, most are unable to change yet. So, I've kind of invented my own in order for me to actually heal and grow. You know, I still try to stay in touch with my family a little. I've kind of said, "Okay. Well, you could live that way, but I'm not going to stay—I'm not going to stay that way. I'll come and visit you every once in a while." But no, they can't be in my life if they are living an unhealthy life. I've got my life, and I've got my family here, and I've created my own family … Well, my wife and my grandchildren and people I know from baseball, AA, and stuff, like [*unnamed*] and all these other guys … They're my brothers now.

Reclaiming the Spirit of Indigenous Role Models

Participants made an effort to identify and connect to role models. Role models are people who exhibit wellness-living. The participants shared that many did not have role models in their lives naturally, and they found creative ways of connection, such as educational institutions or employment, child and family services, and Friendship Centres.

Participant O noted that her first connection to a role model living in a good way, wellness *Mino-pimatisiwin*, was her professor in social work. For O, reclaiming Indigenous role models is essential for wellness and healing:

> My Indigenous prof inspired me; she was a role model, my first role model. It's this weird kind of notion of, "Oh. Oh, maybe I can do this, and maybe I can complete a Bachelor's," that weird feeling of, like, "Okay, this is doable." And so, this prof, she was older, and she was sassy. And she would always say to us, "It doesn't matter what you're doing. It doesn't matter where you are. Just do it in a good way. Live in a good way." That was the teaching of *Mino-pimatisiwin*, that way of being she brought from her community. And it was so impactful … I needed to be mindful of my energy, what I was bringing with me, and how I woke up in the morning. And so, I got that idea tattooed on me when I graduated. She role-modeled for me how I want to do the work and what we are capable of, and it's still with me today.

Reclaiming the Connection to the Spirit of Indigenous Lands

The participants' data verified that reclaiming connection to the Spirit of land explains the embodied, satiating wholeness feeling that participants received when consciously cultivating reverence for Indigenous lands, whether their own Indigenous lands or others'. Participant C shared the first time she experienced reconnecting to her Indigenous lands and how she still goes camping there because it cultivates an experience of deep reverence and connection to her Indigeneity and all her relations:

> I didn't grow up in my community because my parents had split when I was younger. So, I didn't grow up in my community, really—There is a lot of residential school stuff in my community. So, my dad wasn't even connected to his home community. But when I was about 22, I got a job working in my home community. And I remember driving over the border between the non-Indigenous community and the Indigenous community. And I

> had an instant feeling of being home, so being connected to somewhere that I never ever lived and who I am. And I still feel that way when I drive onto that land. It's like I'm connected to this land. This is my home community. And this is where I'm connected.
>
> So, there's that deep ancestral connection to that land … That's how I felt at 22 years old, driving on to this First Nation that I had never lived on, [and] my father hadn't lived on since he was five, because he went to residential school … I remember that feeling of, "Oh my gosh, I'm, like, home. This is my home territory." A real sense of belonging and identity … It's not just somewhere where you live or visit. It's deeper than that … It's a felt sense of wholeness that is so important for wellness.

Reclaiming the Spirit of Personal Wellness

It became apparent to me that a similar phenomenon emerged with the previous theme, *reclaiming the spirit of relational wellness*. That is the essence of reclaiming personal wellness. What I observed in the wellness experts' data was also seen in the role models' data. After observing Spirit emerge in the reclamation of one's relations, it was clear that, in reclaiming the Spirit within oneself, the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects and one's identity and pride are the resulting energetic shifts and embodied changes that, to me, are spiritual. It is the *essence* that each action represents; it is with what Spirit they engage with themselves and an activity that makes it healing and wellness-promoting. Given this new understanding, I move forward with naming the major theme prefaced by Spirit.

Reclaiming the Spirit of Identity

The participants' data uncovered the phenomenon of an internal reclamation of one's identity as an Indigenous person. Participants spoke of the transformation from an internalized

oppression and shame-based Indigenous identity to a proud Indigenous identity. The data highlighted an energetic embodied shift, a Spirit awakening of Indigenous pride. Reclaiming Indigenous pride is the balance of self-worth with humility.

Participant I shared that she has reclaimed her Indigenous pride after feeling shame for much of her life from systemic racism; "And today, there's still a little bit of that [racism]. It used to beat me down most of my life, but as I healed, that changed; I feel good about myself. Today, I'm proud to be Indigenous. Not saying we are better than anyone, but also, we are unique and important, smart, and valuable people."

Reclaiming the Spirit of Healing

Reclaiming the Spirit of healing means reclaiming actions that one understands will support them in healing and personal growth, helping them to become better people who pursue healing for wellness. Participant P shared that part of his mental wellness is continuous personal growth and healing; he views himself as having a limitless possibility of always evolving, believing that one is never finished with personal development; "I always keep pushing myself forward. Are you familiar with the Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book? Yeah? There's a passage in there that says, 'Never rest on your laurels.' I didn't know what 'laurels' meant, and then when I looked it up, it was never be satisfied with who you are."

Reclaiming the Spirit of Emotional Wellness

The participants outlined some of the emotional states they reclaimed for personal wellness, which included peace, cultivated through tolerance, and increased comfort with discomfort and vulnerability.

Reclaiming Peace

Participants reclaimed the Spirit of peace, which went hand-in-hand with the tolerance of discomfort; two examples of which were cold bathing and fasting. Participant P shared that he has reclaimed peace in himself and his life. P engages in fasting, sweating, and cold-water bathing ceremonies to promote peace and well-being:

> I did the fasting thing, and that was like—it was like a big *wow*. Or it just kind of opened my eyes, and I said, "To finally find peace with myself and life." And so, when I saw that, I started to—Because, when you're fasting, you're just there by yourself. No food, no water, just you. So, you got to look within. And so, that was one of the biggest challenges, which was to look within myself and dig deep. I started looking at all my demons and all my life's stuff. Then, I started to dig that out and deal with it. So, yeah, that was—Yeah. I came back to Sweats. I don't use any one of them. Well, sweating, which I use on a regular basis, fasting, and bathing in cold water all provide peace.

Reclaiming Vulnerability

The participants reclaimed a tolerance of vulnerability, which was articulated as a willingness to take risks, to be open to learning new things, and to engage in new experiences (with the intention or Spirit) to promote healing and wellness. Participant O shared that, for her, the loss of her relationship with her partner was a source of renewed, balanced engagement with life:

> I've just recently gone through a breakup, and it wasn't a healthy relationship, you know, co-dependent. My world has opened up. I have always been a more shy, risk-averse person, not wanting to put myself out there for life. So, I decided that I was going to try a

> couple of brand new big activities that I'd never done before. It is scary, but I push myself because I know it is good for me. So, I am taking private singing lessons. And I'm going to be doing Jamaican dance hall dancing, and just whatever comes up that makes me put myself up there. I have opened up to truly embracing life, freedom, and joy.

Reclaiming the Spirit of Mental Wellness

The *Spirit of mental wellness* was demonstrated as part of the reclaimed wellness-promoting perspectives. Some participants directly named wellness-promoting perspectives that they embraced for healing and wellness including non-judgement, positivity, trust, and open-mindedness, which contributed to healing. The participants strived to keep these perspectives at the forefront of their minds to support balance, healing, and wellness.

Reclaiming a Non-Judgemental Perspective

Participant P articulated the importance of non-judgement of others, which has a reciprocal effect on his own mindset and relationship to himself:

> In my last relationship, she always challenged me every day to say, "Go through this day without complaining. Go through this day without condemning anybody and just have this day be really positive." And so, I do that to this day. I do my best not to complain about anything, and sometimes it's really difficult to do because you're [thinking] "Urgh." And then not to condemn anybody, not to call them down, or anything like that, just to be able to do that every day. It just kind of keeps my brain in a more positive way, less judgement toward myself, too.

Reclaiming a Positive Perspective

Participant P noted that he strives to maintain a positive mindset and refrain from complaining:

> I always like the law of attraction, but I don't know whether you've heard about that. If you have positive thoughts and a positive life, you're always going to attract positivity into your life. And so, if you have a negative mindset, you're going to attract negative things. For me, it's always wanting to be positive. It attracts positivity into my life.

Reclaiming a Trusting Perspective

Participants indicated that acceptance is a fundamental understanding for their mental wellness, which allows them to release worry, fear, and control around whatever is at that time and maintain a clear mind. Participant P expressed this thought directly, saying, "Just trust the process. Whatever is going to happen is going to happen; do not worry or stress or have a busy mind about it. This keeps your mind clear."

Reclaiming an Open-Minded Perspective

Participants reclaimed an open-minded perspective, which means embracing self-inquiry and self-awareness to understand one's own perspectives and the limits to one's beliefs, and to be open to other diverse perspectives and ideas with openness and non-judgement. Participant P shared how he has reclaimed an open-minded perspective. He now maintains a mind of unknowing and inquiry. To gain new perspectives, P consciously engages in conversations that will cultivate inquiry into his beliefs to find his edges and challenge and support his personal growth:

> I have been kind of pushing my thoughts to their edge of not knowing—to be able to change how I think from the old P, coming into a new way of thinking and not just to say, "Okay. It's black and white." For example, I looked at my idea of relationships because, in all my relationships, it's been black or white, and then it didn't make sense to me. So, I

> talked to my friends about it and read about it. And so, when we have a conversation, it's really about challenging ourselves and each other in a good way. With my friend I have now, we push each other to find our edges. We need to find the edge of our beliefs and thinking. With [*unnamed*], I love him in all ways because we push each other to the edge because I'm like, "Urgh. Just, urgh." It is tough. But it expands our thinking.

Self-inquiry is an open-minded perspective that is achieved through a mental exercise to check-in. Participant I provided an example of self-inquiry and how it leads to personal empowerment. She used to feel unable to respond to herself and her life, and, once she reclaimed self-inquiry, she also reclaimed empowerment to seek the Wisdom within herself:

> I have to make sure all four directions are balanced in order for me to move forward. If I'm stuck, I have to go through and ask myself, "Why am I stuck here?" I began to question myself, but in a good way; I'm not going to go ask some outside person. We need to look inward, like, "I don't know what's wrong with me." And, as it turns out, I used to believe I didn't know nor have the answers to my own self and life. So, only we humans know what's going on in our life. And, if we look inward, we're all born with the gift, we're all born with the Wisdom, and we need to rely on that and reconnect to that knowing and inner Wisdom to guide us.

Reclaiming the Spirit of Spiritual Wellness

The participants demonstrated the *Spirit of spiritual wellness*, as they sought out and reclaimed spiritual wellness, which transcends religion. Participants defined reclaiming the Spirit within spiritual wellness as the goodness in all one's relations and self that will promote one's

wellness. Spirit offers support, not shame or condemnation. Participant P shared his experience of reclaiming spirituality, differentiating it from religion:

> I'll tell you my story. I was looking for some kind of spirituality, and I didn't know what spirituality was, culture, tradition, or any of that kind of stuff. I didn't know what that meant. And so, I went on this journey to find out what that is. And I went to Arizona, and I heard—because they did this pilgrimage stuff because Jesus carried the cross and all that kind of stuff, so I went, and I did that. It was like 40 degrees outside, and here I am carrying this cross or dragging this cross, and I'm thinking, "This is not spirituality." There was nothing there for me, and that is when it hit me. And then I did all kinds of Christian stuff, just singing the Baptist, First Baptist, and all that kind of stuff. Went and did that. Some of them were a lot of fun. And I enjoyed what they practiced, but it didn't grab me. Then, I went to Thailand, where I watched these monks do what they were doing. And I said, "Wow. That's really powerful, what they do." They were of service. And so, I thought, "Okay. I'm going to give this a shot." And so, I asked about it, and then what kind of pushed me away was that they had 242 rules to follow, and I'm not good at rules. I hate rules. And so, I said, "Okay. That's not going to work for me." But I liked what they were about; they were about being of service to people. So, I kept that part of it. To be of service to people. And then I came back and said, "Well, I'm going to go do the Native thing." And my uncle would always tell me, he would say, "[*Indigenous language spoken*]." And I didn't know what that meant, [*Indigenous language spoken*]. And he said, "Well, if you have questions, go out and ask the mountains." And so, I went and fasted, and that's where I started my whole spirituality and found my Spirit.

Participant I shared how she reconnected to the belief in Spirit on a trip to a sacred Indigenous area in the south of what is called the United States:

> I talked earlier about being the daughter of my mom and dad, but where did I come from before that? We came in different planes, and when I really started to believe in seeing Spirit, Ronnie and I went down South. We went to the monument, and we saw [Spirit] all in the breeze. We walked up, and I heard this man talking to me. I looked around, and Ronnie was ahead of me, and he kept calling me his granddaughter. And I said, "Who the hell is that?" Then I knew my grandfather, and now more of my Ancestors are with me.

Participant T stated that he reclaimed spirituality through reconnection to nature, the land, and ceremony; "Spirituality. I reconnected to it out on the land. When you spend enough time out in nature, it connects you. You will see things; you will hear things. And then, even if you have some ceremony, ceremony even makes it better. I'm in a different Spirit world in ceremony."

Reclaiming the Spirit of Physical Health

Participants explained that the *physical* refers to the physical aspects of oneself and one's environment, including one's physical body, nutrition, food, and substances one consumes. I differentiate that it is the *Spirit of physical health* because it became apparent, as participants spoke, that it is with the Spirit and energy that they do something that makes it wellness-promoting. Physical health can include a myriad of activities, from resting, to movement, to fasting, or caring for the environment. The data revealed how physical wellness might also span the Western mainstream concept of physical health. All participants noted the importance of physical wellness in the form of caring for the physical body and doing so with the Spirit of care.

Participant O shared that, as she healed and reclaimed wellness, she reclaimed her physical health as an act of care. Through caring for herself, she reclaimed liberation and energy for her life and her wellness:

> To be completely honest, it wasn't always like how I am now. I have worked hard on my physical health. In the last couple of years, I've lost a lot of weight—over 100 pounds—which now allows me to do those things and not be so stuck, a prisoner in my body. And I really acknowledge that when you are overweight, it changes everything. I was at risk of many illnesses. It's a very dark place to be physically and mentally. And so, here I am now, four years later. I have learned that physical health is not just about physical activity; it's about eating well and not consuming harmful things, or when we do, it needs to be in little moderation, like alcohol. It is a clean environment and physical space; it's the physical representation of life and the mindset of engaging with [and] caring for your body physically, not from shame, but care. I still have my physical health and maintain that care for it. I'm still checking off boxes. The energy I got back hasn't gone away. So now, I'm kind of trying to just acknowledge that this is just who I am, that it's fine, that I'm not faking anything, and I am a healthy person; I never saw myself that way before. This new level of energy will be here to stay, and it will be good.

Reclaiming the Spirit of Indigenous Medicine

Part of caring for one's physical health is the conscientious choice of what one consumes in the Spirit of care for oneself. Participants noted the importance of reclaiming Indigenous foods and Medicine as part of healing and well-being, but also, as important as ingesting them, is the belief in the Spirit of the Medicines. Traditional Medicine is said to work only if one believes in

it. Participant I recounted that reclaiming Indigenous wellness meant resistance to, and belief in, Indigenous healing approaches. I shared that she strives to reorient her perspective on healing to prioritize Indigenous Medicine and practices over Western ways. For Participant I, Western medicine is the last resort:

> Well, one thing about wellness, I hate to take mainstream medicines. When I was young, I took them faithfully. I got a cold, and I'm going to go see the doctor. I'm going to get some medicines, and that's going to heal me … [Now] I ask myself, "Okay, why do I need to take mainstream medicines? Is there something of our equivalent that I can use out there?" And so, when my dad was still alive, I asked my dad, "How come you take so much medicine? You take all those pills; what are they for?" And he goes, "I do not know. The doctor gave them to me." So, he didn't understand. So, I went and talked to my doctor, and I said, "Why do you think I have to take all this medicine?" And he says, "Because you asked for it." I seldom would take any medication. Ten years ago, I would take an Aleve, or an Advil, or a Tylenol for headaches, for migraine … So, I turned to our Medicines. I started going out into the mountain and picking our soap berries … "Okay, this is what I need. I need the traditional stuff." I believed in it … I truly believe in our traditional Medicines.

Phase Three: Summary

The data exposed the many relations that the wellness role models felt were necessary to reclaim their wellness. It appears that their reclamations were the first engagement with and reconnection to what would be necessary for wellness for the role models. The reclamation of wellness, culture, the Spirit of all one's relations, personal wellness, and Spirit together laid the

foundation of healing for participants to step into wellness in the subsequent phase; *living in wellness.*

Phase Four: Living Cultural Wellness Guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity

Phase four, *living cultural wellness guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity*, has three major themes; 1) culture, 2) the Spirit of relational wellness, and 3) the Spirit of personal wellness. The three core themes are like strands that, when braided together, become living cultural wellness guided by Spirit.

Culture

Culture is lived through embodiment and action of one's cultural values, integrated into the contemporary colonial context, and guided by Elders' Wisdom. This includes

- Living guided by the Spirit of our Elders
- The Spirit of living in a good way
- Living the Spirit of wellness values; balance, integrity, simplicity, adaptation, and integration

The Spirit of Relational Wellness

All one's relations that were reclaimed in phase three live on. The wellness role models brought forward the gifts they receive from their relations, including:

- The Spirit of Indigenous connection, which is realized through culture, language, service, and, gathering and celebration.

The Spirit of Kinship. The Spirit of kinship roles supported participants' wellness; these include the

- Spirit of a mother

- Spirit of a father
- Spirit of aunties and uncles
- Spirit of a grandmother
- Spirit of a grandfather

The Spirit of Support. One's relations provided support to the wellness role models through

- Encouragement
- Kindness
- Allyship
- Honesty
- Acceptance
- Compassionate listening
- Integrity

The Spirit of Contribution. The wellness role models indicated that their wellness is in direct reciprocal relationship with their support to other Indigenous people by offering

- Healing and wellness
- Sharing Wisdom
- Wellness role model
- Embodying an Elder
- Culture
- Activism

The Spirit of Personal Wellness

Personal wellness involves the intrapersonal efforts and engagements to promote wellness, which were communicated through the Medicine Wheel model; physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. The Spirit of physical wellness is achieved through

- Balanced sleep
- Balanced diet
- Traditional Medicine
- Avoidance or limited engagement with colonial substances.
- Movement

The Spirit of mental wellness is supported through

- Cleanliness
- Physical activity
- Routine mental wellness practices

The Spirit of emotional wellness is achieved through

- Processing emotions
- Diverse tools and approaches
- Therapy and support groups
- Meditation.
- Practice of presence
- Boundaries
- Self-inquiry
- Self-love

- Spiritual practices
- Social connection
- Physical activity
- Humour

Spiritual approaches that supported the wellness role models included

- Indigenous cultural objects
- Indigenous ceremonies
- Spiritual prayer
- Religious prayer
- Nature
- Gratitude

What was most surprising to me was the emergence of the Spirit from the data, similar to what I uncovered in the *reclaiming* phase. Participants commonly referred to *the essence* or, as I have come to understand it, the Spirit within any given phenomenon or action; it was the Spirit or intention with which they would engage with any activity that would determine if they were, in fact, living Indigenously. One participant explained that, from the perspective of an objective observer, their actions look like those of any other person, but when one looks closer at the underlying intention or Spirit by which any action is inspired, it is rooted in striving for wellness. With this understanding and context, this chapter is also aligned with the Reclaim phase, in that every theme is done with Spirit.

The *Spirit of wellness* is a phase that emerged from the data of the wellness role models. Up to this point, the experts' and role models' phases aligned, which illustrated that the process

of healing through the first three phases is vital to living in wellness, as demonstrated by both groups. However, the Spirit of wellness is the outcome exemplified by only the role models, as a result of the different questions that were posed to them that focused on what living in wellness looks like, lived. In spite of the effort to focus the entirety of the research on wellness, the healing process still emerged and was literally unavoidable.

From the data, it was apparent that all that was reclaimed through participants' previous healing phases now serves as the foundation for living guided by Spirit for cultural wellness. The framework is set. A life guided by Spirit is a verb; it is the ongoing living through the framework of what was reclaimed, continued ongoing reclamations, and ongoing healing, all while thriving as an Indigenous person with a deep connection to self, one's relations, purpose, and wellness contribution. What was reclaimed cannot be robbed again if one lives guided by Spirit. Living guided by Spirit is an active pursuit, an ongoing walk through life on a path to wellness to become an Elder. No longer were the participants on the path of suffering and survival, as they were when they were misguided by a trauma-determined life and living in a colonial trance prior to engagement with this healing process.

Indigenous wellness is the embodiment of the Indigenous Spirit, which is living the Spirit of cultural values expressed in contemporary ways with the intention of Indigenous contribution and the vision to become an Elder. The intention to pursue wellness arises from the calling to Indigenous wellness contribution, which is inspired by cultural values that always promote personal and relational wellness.

The data uncovered the foundations of contemporary cultural wellness that are rooted in two core Wisdom teachings that will always guide the participants in their lives in the pursuit of

wellness. Regardless of their life situation, the core vision that they would draw on to illuminate their path included *the Spirit of Elders* and the *Spirit of living in a good way*. These two core foundations set the context for how they would relate to themselves and all their relations to promote personal and relational wellness.

Living Guided by the Spirit of Elders. Participants are guided by the Spirit of their Elders, as one living as a healthy Elder would do. Participant E grew up with healthy Elder role models, so she strives to model how they lived. Alternatively, if one did not have healthy Elders available growing up, they can envision how the Elders might live and embody that Spirit to guide their lives in a good way:

> I grew up with my mom, and my grandmother, and my aunts, who were big prayer women, so prayer and spirituality are a big part of my life. Yeah. And so, I try to [follow] the personality of my grandmother. So, I try to be neutral, always. Honesty is a big thing for me, from my mom and my grandparents—always to be honest and live an honest life. That's something that I practice, and I believe in. No matter what it is, it's just to always try to take [the high] road and be honest with everything, no matter what situation it is. And, yeah, I think [the] spiritual and prayer part is a big thing for me.

Participant P shared a similar example that through a visioning exercise, he connects to Elders' Wisdom:

> Some of us don't have Elders and access to Elders' Wisdom, but we might have different people with different life experiences and teachings, and we can go to each of them, and together, there is a lot of Wisdom there. The more life experience and the more you learn, the more you can also imagine what an Elder would say. That's what I do, anyhow.

The Spirit of Living In a Good Way. The essence of *living in a good way* was reclaimed from the data, and now it is a way of life that promotes wellness. Participant T shared:

> I try to do everything in a good way now. I had a conversation with someone yesterday, and they told me, "Well, you're pretty smooth…Your life looks well for you." That was just told to me yesterday. I said, "Well, the thing is that, if you do everything in a good way, that's the way it is; your life looks smooth and good, and, even when you have struggles, like death, you still are doing good overall, in spite of struggles."

Living the Spirit of Wellness Values. The data rendered the information that the *Spirit of wellness values* are the principles and beliefs that guide one's life and will always promote personal and relational wellness. The wellness values are consistent across contexts, but the expression is unique. Wellness values inspire the individual's behaviour and root their life in positive and fulfilling meaning. Participants consciously created their lives and aligned their behaviour with wellness values. Participants intentionally and consistently strove to live guided by the cultural values and adapt them to contemporary life. Participant T stated that, "As long as you know your culture and values and ways, that's a new warrior, nowadays. That is this growth that—As long as you're living in the 21st century, but you're doing with purpose and for others, bringing those to life now, that's what wellness is. That's what I consider wellness now." Participant C shared that, from an outsider's perspective, a person living in wellness may not look any different from a non-Indigenous person at any moment. C believed that, for her, the differentiation of Indigenous wellness is about being clear on why one acts a given way, or what inspires action and behaviour. Living in wellness, according to Participant C, is living intentionally and with integrity in one's values:

> I think it's about—It's not like anything we do would be or look different than maybe others [non-Indigenous] living well. I guess how I see it [is that] anything I would do is all me being Indigenous. It's—I guess, the value or reason I'm doing it would make it Indigenous for me—like, I'm identifying it as being Indigenous and living Indigenous because, in a way, what I do will align with my Indigenous values.

The values that were articulated, with illustrative examples that build on the values previously reclaimed in the earlier phase, included the Spirit of balance, integrity, simplicity, adaptation, and integration.

The Spirit of Balance. The *Spirit of balance* emerged from that data. The Spirit of balance was reclaimed and now requires consistent holistic engagement to strive for balance. Participants described balancing as the ongoing effort of continuously engaging with balancing the intrapersonal and interpersonal forces in one's life. Intrapersonal forces include the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual, while interpersonal elements include all one's relations.

Participant C noted that the framework for her life in wellness is the Medicine Wheel, which she embraces to guide personal inquiry and assess balance so she can take the necessary actions to rebalance as needed. C demonstrated regular and conscious awareness of her balance while looking to trusted relations to illuminate and support her in taking steps toward balance. Balance is a constant process and action. One is never balanced; they are always balancing, as Participant C described:

> It's really important, the idea of balancing the four aspects of self, the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional, and doing things that help me balance that, and then also recognizing when one of those pieces of self is out of balance, and then looking at that

and doing activities that help to bring that back into balance. So, if my spiritual gets out of balance, then I look to, like, "Okay. What can I do to help balance that?" So, for me, that kind of stuff is like going out for walks, reading, or connecting with people. So, yeah, so really looking at each of those four aspects of self and just, like, self-checking, "Hey, how are you doing?" For example, if your physical condition is out of balance, you can tell. If you're not eating well or you're not being very active, bring that back into balance. It is like self-checking and just looking at, "Okay. How can I balance that out again?" if I feel like it's getting out of balance. Sometimes, my partner will say, "Oh, what's up?" because he can see that things are out of whack. And sometimes, he'll suggest, "Let's go for a walk," right? So, it's like self-reflection. And, like, I don't do a formal—Like, I don't get up and practice yoga every morning. But sometimes, I'll do yoga because I'm like, "Okay. I need to balance myself out again," or I just need to meditate. I think it's an awareness of what you need and then just figuring out what kind of meets that need.

Participant I offered another understanding of the balance that is fundamental to wellness:

Balance is trying to connect all four directions and what they represent. And if one isn't working, you've got to ask yourself, "Okay, you're looking at the elements, okay, what is it about fire? Why am I seeing flames?" And you've got to ask yourself, "Why? What does fire have to do with how I'm thinking or feeling? And is that the light that I need to go to?" And we talked about the air quality. And so, I'm going through all those elements, the water, the air, and the fire and [I] ask myself, "Oh, I have to really balance life itself."

The Spirit of Integrity. *Living the Spirit of integrity*, as participants described it, is to live in alignment with one's values, beliefs, and actions; there is a unified congruity of one's values and how one lives. Participant P explained that to live in wellness means that you walk as you talk. He recognizes it is a challenge, but believes it is imperative:

> Living this way keeps me on the straight and narrow. I'm always about practicing what you preach. And so, if I'm telling people this here, then I should be doing this. I shouldn't be going through the bar and having a few drinks or going to have a few tokes or whatever. If I want to walk this path, then I should be living this path. And so, I do my best to live like that, to live in that way of spirituality. And sometimes, I don't want to do that, but it keeps my mind focused on this is what I have to do. And so, if I'm running Sweats, then I should be living a life that will promote Sweat Lodges and that kind of thing.

The Spirit of Simplicity. The data suggest that living the Spirit of simplicity is an ongoing effort to strive for simplicity. In the contemporary world, it is very easy to get consumed by making this complex; simplicity supports staying rooted in doing and needing only what is necessary and looking at ways to simplify one's life. Participant O shared how nature reminds her to de-center herself and resituate herself as part of nature, as not more important than, but connected to and a part of the natural world as another being, and reminds her, also, to keep her life and wellness simple:

> I think reminding myself that I am not any more important than any other piece of my natural world, reminding myself that I'm an animal, I think that that's been really critical. I am no different than even my dog in many ways. We both need sleep. We both need food. We both need movement. We both need air and water. The basics of life are the

> same and we need to keep it simple. And that's really humbling. Just that, in itself, is—right. So, my needing to go to the beach is actually as important as anything else. My need to have time for myself, needing to sleep a normal number of hours and then get up and do things, is critical, and it's natural, like any other animal. Wellness, in many ways, is simple.

The Spirit of Adaptation. The participants advocated for the *Spirit of adaptation*, which was reclaimed to be lived. Adaptation is the ability to align one's life in the contemporary sociocultural context with wellness values and to consistently ensure the integrity of one's life with the beliefs and values that promote wellness. Adaptation was an essential strategy spanning all domains, values, and themes for participants to achieve wellness. Throughout the data, there was a consistent engagement with adapting; adaptation presented itself as a value and a process required to achieve wellness in a contemporary colonial context.

Participant T shared that, for himself, and based on what he witnessed from others, he knows that contemporary Indigenous wellness is living the value of adaption that is expressed through living in a good way, having a good mindset, being connected to nature and the land, and consistent, conscious innovation to live guided by traditional teachings in today's world:

> Pretty well everybody I know is Indigenous, and most of them are in a good way. They're all hunting. They're all doing something outside. They're fishing. And they got the mindset. A lot of us are getting to the mindset of being Indigenous. What is Indigenous in the 21st century? Kind of adapting to the changing world every year … To live in wellness. I live in wellness, mostly because it's hard to stay in the 21st century and live

with our cultural and traditional ways. I had to actually learn, and I am still learning, how to bring our old ways and implement them into my life now.

Participant B explained that, in the face of the contemporary colonial world where many Indigenous people are living away from their Indigenous territory, she embraces the Spirit of adaptation in ways that cultivate connection and reclaim a connection to her spirituality, Indigeneity, and culture, through media recordings:

> I'm away from my home territory, so I need to adapt. So, for me, what brings that spirituality and culture to me is listening to recordings of family songs, even Nation songs. So, for me, it'll be *Nuu-chah-nulth*, I'll listen to that. Within those are prayer songs, honour songs, and songs that move emotion. I've always thought that songs are a really powerful way of shifting energy, of strengthening energy. And when I say "energy," I'm probably talking more about spiritual and emotional well-being. You can say things, but if you don't experience it, it's a little bit different.

Living the Spirit of Integration. The participants highlighted how they live guided by the Spirit of integration and are consistently integrating their lives, which is an abstract concept, but examples from the data assist in making this complex abstract idea comprehensible and visible. Integration is the conscious and deliberate process of aligning one's actions with Wisdoms of wellness and wellness values, to make objective and seemingly unintegrated and independent actions into meaningful, complex, and wellness-promoting engagements. For example, from an objective lens, it may look like a person is simply walking in nature, but for the person who is doing the activity and living in the pursuit of wellness, the activity is far more integrated and complex than simply walking in the woods. What became clear was the integrated

nature of the example; walking in the woods is a holistic, integrated experience of promoting a balance of Indigenous connection to the land, all one's relations, physical activity, and is a meditative practice for emotional well-being. Integration is an essential feature of Indigenous wellness, bringing depth, intentionality, and meaning to one's life.

Participant E exemplified how living in wellness is the integration of the vital elements of wellness that are woven into a single experience that nourishes one's holistic wellness. Participant E explained how connecting to the natural world is foundational to wellness and balance. In this excerpt, integration is clear; the context of the natural world is the domain where each quadrant can be nurtured and integrated, along with her Indigenous identity and belonging:

> The natural world is essential for wellness. I guess it's in line with the traditional and cultural connection. So, I connect with some of the cultural and traditional people about making Medicine, picking Medicine, and knowing more about everything that comes off the land. So that's part and parcel of being a helper and knowing where you come from. And, yeah, I think just being aware of what's really healthy for me … The natural world provides a balance of the spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional. I think just having balance of your mind and body … And connecting to the environment in that way, being out and active … You're not just going out to pick berries for food; it's an intentional and holistic experience.

For Participant B, her physical activity, walking, is an integrated experience that reconnects her to her own Indigeneity and to her children's, and grandchildren's, to her role as a mother and grandmother, and to the land, culture, language, and teachings. The walks evoke memories. During B's walks, she is able to reconnect to her children, the cultural stories, and the

Wisdom she has shared over her lifetime while she has walked with them on the same land that inspired the Wisdom:

> When we go out in our territories, not only am I walking, but it is also time on the land. I really reflect on the times I brought my children with me, and I tell them stories about their connection to the area, and I would tell them stories that stayed with me from my Ancestors, the ones that came before me so that, in time, they will also do the same with their children or grandchildren. Place names and how they got those place names are important. Even now, with my husband, we go out and see land formations that have oral stories or coyote stories that, as you know, have many meanings. So, you think about that, and we talk about that, and somehow then spin into how it connects with today's environment at large, the political issues, and the people we see at the forefront. How would Coyote fit in here? Is he influencing something here? And then we just laugh it off, let go of that political struggle, whatever it is, and then continue on.

The Spirit of Relations. The participants conveyed the powerful positive impact of the Spirit of one's relations, which promotes one's wellness. The Spirit of one's relations was reclaimed in the previous phase. To continue to live and maintain their interconnection to one's relations within the contemporary colonial context means deliberate striving for ongoing Indigenous connection, kinship, support, and contribution, because the alternative of not striving is separation from the relations due to the inherently poisoning colonial context. One must actively reinforce the connection to their relations within the colonial context.

The Spirit of one's relations is the essence and gifts that one's relations offer. One's relations, such as grandmother or father, are not necessarily the concrete Western-defined

understanding of specific relations; rather, they are the Spirit of those roles. The Spirit of relations includes and permeates beyond the literal biological Western definitions of relations, (e.g., a mother, father, aunt) and embodies the Spirit through the contributions and gifts that those roles provide. The reciprocal relationship of wellness between individuals and their relations was revealed through the data. Individuals experienced enhanced wellness because of their relations, but only insofar as they contributed to others' healing or wellness; there is no receiving the gifts that one's relations offer that support personal wellness without contributing to others' wellness.

Indigenous Connection

Indigenous connection happened when the participants had a felt sense of being connected to other Indigenous people and Indigenous relations, through such things as land, the Ancestors, or culture. The felt sense of Indigenous connection is necessary for wellness and is cultivated through the participant's actions and creative pursuits to initiate and maintain an ongoing connection to Indigenous relations, which reinforces a felt sense of Indigenous belonging. Within the colonial context, Indigenous connection may not be inherent; it was reclaimed in the previous phase and is actively maintained in a life guided by Spirit for wellness. Participants engaged in a myriad of activities to foster Indigenous connection. Participants engaged with culture and language, provided service to other Indigenous people, and travelled with the intention to meet other Indigenous relations, all of which, when engaged with the Spirit of connection, provided participants with the feeling of being connected to other Indigenous relations.

Culture. For the study participants, Indigenous connection is fostered through culture. Indigenous cultural activities, such as powwows or stick games, are a source of maintaining

Indigenous connection. Participant I shared a direct example of her stick game family, who are a source of Indigenous connection. This family consists of Indigenous people from all over North America who travel to meet one another. When they are not physically connected, they maintain their connection through social media. Participant I stated that:

> Our stick game family is so amazing; they are Indigenous people from all over. Before COVID hit, we played a lot of stick games … It is great; it's just going and being with them and singing songs … So, our stick game family, they're all over, right? We have some downstate, some in Alberta, and some down the coast and on the island. We stay connected. Some will add us on Facebook … And so, [our] stick game family, we look after one another and stay connected all year.

Participant B shared that she fosters Indigenous connection by participating in community cultural activities such as Potlatch or powwows:

> I think the Indigenous connection is so important. The idea of being included or participating in traditional events like the powwow, for one, and the other on the Coast is the Potlatch. And the gathering of Indian events where everybody gets together and dances their own way. Having good thoughts and intentions while doing that and being of a clean mind, body, and soul bring in different feelings. It seems to make you feel so much better and gives you energy. It energizes you to maybe do a little bit of something else.

Language. The Indigenous connection was cultivated through Indigenous language for some participants. The contemporary context includes a myriad of ways to connect to language, such as remote Indigenous language classes or language apps. Participant E exemplified her

creative and resourceful approaches in contemporary life to connect through her work and, more recently, through remote language classes. Participant E uses virtual spaces to learn her language and connect to Elders. She notes that she has to be resourceful because there is not one coordinated place to connect to Elders or Traditional people or to learn the culture, so she actively pursues opportunities and grasps them when they present themselves:

> I do try to connect with my traditional and cultural people—that's my contract with First Nations Health Authority—and I find that really helps my Spirit and helps me stay grounded … And right now, I'm taking [a] language class by Zoom, because I lost my language with school. So, I'm doing that, but I really try to connect with Elders and traditional people. And it's kind of fragmented now, because my own community—there's not really—there's very few Elders that still practice, so I do my best to connect with them. And if not, it's … Traditional people or even Okanagan. So, it's kind of a mix, but I try to stay connected with that.

Service. The participants brought forward the notion that, when one engages to be in service to other Indigenous people, in the Spirit of connection, they receive the gift of feeling connected. Being in service to other Indigenous people, through volunteering or formal employment, by offering one's gifts and strengths was common amongst all participants because it fostered Indigenous connection. Participant B shared that she maintains her Indigenous connection to culture and ceremonies through her work:

> I am lucky because I get to participate in cultural events related to the different things happening in the territories. And it's often work-related or part of my work, and that

> regular connection is awesome, too. So, I get to participate in many ceremonies, like releasing salmon and other cultural ceremonies.

Participant E affirmed that she maintains a connection to her Indigenous community from afar by utilizing her physical disconnect as a source of connection. When her Indigenous relations come to a nearby city for services, or they need help navigating health, an area about which she is knowledgeable, she steps forward to support them:

> Because I haven't lived in [*unnamed*] for so long, I do go back periodically, but really, I stay connected by always offering to help through advocating. I spend a lot of time advocating for my people for health services, especially if they come to Kelowna. I have Elders who call me and text me, and I'm advocating for them for health stuff. So, I do a lot of that, and they know they can contact me. And so, I'm proud of where I come from, and my Ancestors there—not only from my community but my dad's community … They're still my people, my family, so I want to help them wherever I can, no matter where I am.

Travel. Participants demonstrated that Indigenous connection can be fostered through the travel that is done with the Spirit and intention to connect with Indigenous relations and the land where one visits; this means cultivating reverence for the Indigenous people and their lands, learning some of their culture, and showing respect for all the Indigenous relations that exist, including how one conducts themselves as a visitor. Participant B explained:

> I really love to travel and explore. I love to see different Indigenous cultures. My husband and I have been down to New Mexico and Arizona and have been into the off-the-beaten-path communities. We have felt their connection to their land and made an effort to meet

> the people and learn about their culture. We walk as visitors to their territory; they are so welcoming, and their willingness to share stories about their place, to me, is really nice. It's heartwarming, and sometimes it's spiritual, too, in a way that's unexpected.

The Spirit of Gathering and Celebration. The data indicated that gathering and celebrating with other Indigenous people with the Spirit of connection provides a sense of being connected to other Indigenous people. Participants noted that they sought out the reason for celebration or gathering to foster and maintain a connection. Within the contemporary context, the connection can be a challenge, given the many barriers such as living physically apart; therefore, participants took extra care to note causes for celebration, such as birthdays, and create reasons for Indigenous gatherings, some cultural, like powwows, and some not, like a bowling group. All gatherings had two things in common; Indigenous focus and inclusivity, created with the Spirit of *no one left behind* to enhance Indigenous connection. Participant C shared her feeling that:

> Gathering is important for Indigenous people. Again, it's like, I think Indigenous people, some are connected and gathering, but many are not yet … But when I think about how we are, as Indigenous people, we need to make sure we are always including people—I say, "Come on, join in. Come and participate in this." Yeah, and just welcoming people at whatever level they're at. Like, if you go to a powwow, they'll be like, "Come on. Come on, dance." And you're like, "I don't know how to dance." And they're like, "No, just come join us." So, yeah. Again, it's just like, at the core, that's who I am. But I also know [that], at the core of who I am, I'm an Indigenous person, right? I include and find a reason to promote gathering.

> And, if I know they're on their own, if they don't have a partner, we invite them to come along with us and enjoy these activities with us. And I think that that's important … And then, another way to gather, one is through food. And again, with Indigenous people, food is so important. Whether it's bringing your babies into the world or when you're heading out the Eastern door, there's feasting that happens. And so, when I think of how our family and community get together, it's like that feasting part, that importance of food and everybody bringing food, right … So, it's not just like one person doing the cooking. Like, everybody brings food. Everybody contributes to that part of it. And yeah, I just really feel like that's a real Indigenous kind of sharing of stuff.

Participant B acknowledged that, in the contemporary context, there is a physical separation from family; therefore, in-person connection is more of a challenge. When others are not accessible, she makes adaptations like connecting through Messenger to maintain her connection to her relations; they have virtual gatherings and celebrations through group chats. Participant B noted that her roles and connections to family and social networks are rooted in celebrating one another and maintaining regular connections:

> Celebrating and gathering is important [in] that we acknowledge each other's birthdays, and we celebrate times when different events happen to keep our connection. We acknowledge each other for these different holidays or different days. It gives us an opportunity to reach out and say "Hello. How are you?" And checking in on each other like that. Especially when I get a Messenger chat with my grandson, and we do group chats … Growing up, I was told stories about how we all lived in the same household, in the same village, and close to each other, and that was reality. It was just different then.

> So, coming together when we can is really important … Coming together to celebrate, coming together to grieve, acknowledging contributions by someone that's passed, memories, and shared feelings for someone that's passed.

The Spirit of Kinship

The Spirit of Indigenous kinship is cultivated by coming into relation and embracing one's role within the Spirit of family. The data defined the Spirit of kinship as a wellness-promoting force that connects one to the Spirit of the family and core family roles, such as the Spirit of a grandparent, mother, father, or auntie, which is an integrated and reciprocal wellness-promoting experience. The Spirit of kinship includes roles that can be biologically given or assumed.

The Spirit of the Mother. It was observed in the data that the Spirit of a mother offers trusting and reliable warm care, connection, and support of a person with whom one can share one's life, and that Spirit will be received and held with love. It was clear from the data that the Spirit of a mother does not have to be offered by a literal mother, but it can be. The Spirit of a mother is a core Matriarch who is the central connection to the rest of the core "family" who can share meaningful updates, enhancing the sense of belonging to one's relations. The Spirit of the mother offers supportive listening and sharing, as well as humour and perspective. Participant O affirmed that her mother is a primary support for her emotional well-being. She is someone O can rely on; she offers trust and is someone she can share her life with, and call on for support when needed. O's mother fosters family connections, offers updates on relations, and shares family stories, which foster belonging:

> Honestly, one of the biggest people in my life is my mom. She is, like, my key person. There's nothing that I go through in a day that she doesn't know about … I own a little house on a ranch in Mexico that she's helping me fix up and do all the work on … My mom is my core person. We talk every day. We joke. She brings my entire family into my ear. I know what's going on with all my aunties, and the gossip, and it's a huge—She's one of 13. So, it's like going through the list of, "Well, how is Uncle, and what are they up to, and what's she doing?" And that brings me home, right, because I haven't been back to Mexico in four years, through COVID, and I just haven't been able to go back. So that's been such a disconnect, and having that info is so good. It's so important. She also tells me our family stories and reminds me of them at certain points in my life when I need to hear them.

The Spirit of Father. The Spirit of a father offers care and protection; they provide for others and teach culture. Participants' data revealed that the role can be offered by a literal or chosen father; it is the Spirit in which they related to the participant as a father that matters. Participant P explained that he embraced the role, which gave him and his children a sense of belonging to one another. Living that role meant teaching them culture, protecting them, and caring for them:

> Being a father is important for me, as I care for my kids and make sure they have what they need; we belong to one another. I brought my kids into a Sweat when they were babies, as an introduction, but then after that, they didn't want to come into a Sweat. But last year, my twins wanted to have a Sweat, and they said, "Dad, we want to have a Sweat, but we want it to be a teaching Sweat. We don't want it to be a hot Sweat like you

> usually do. So just teach us, don't burn us." And so that was real, that was teaching them that it is my job to teach and keep them safe; they trust me. It made me proud that they wanted me to teach them. And so, I teach them. I taught them this is what the Sweat is about, and this is what the rocks represent. This is what the fire represents. This is what the ribs represent. And so, teaching them all of those things. So now, they have an understanding of what that means and what I do. Because they really didn't understand what I did for a living. They just know I'm old, and I talk to people about different topics, and one of the topics that we talked about was Sweat. As a father, it is my job to teach them these things.

The Spirit of Aunties and Uncles. The Spirit of aunties and uncles is essential within the Spirit of family. The participants offered, through their examples, their belief that the Spirit of an aunty or an uncle offers parental support, and they play parental roles when the parents need respite; they also offer their unique gifts and strengths to teach the children, so the children receive diverse wise teachings and lessons from the many aunties and uncles in their lives. Participant C shared her feeling that these roles within the Spirit of family support her, and her relationship wellness, through those living the roles of aunties. C understood that the Spirit of family means embracing the Spirit of aunties. The Spirit of an auntie supports mothers through respite, teaching, and caring for the children, in collaboration with the mothers and grandmothers. From this perspective, mothers are not the only ones responsible for caring for and raising children; aunts and uncles are also responsible for children. In an Indigenous post-colonial family context, one will take on roles within the Spirit of the family, as aunties and

uncles, as each person offers their unique gifts to the children for their wellbeing and growth. Participant C explained:

> My family's support is a big part of my wellness. And when we talk about the aunties, I don't literally just mean biological. Even my daughter is like an aunt to her friend's kids, right? I think that's a real Indigenous piece, right? The whole idea is that everyone is responsible for ensuring that these kids are raised in a good way and that these kids have, like, people who are supporting them, and people that they know they can go to, with different strengths and expertise to offer. Like, my own children, they have aunties that aren't blood—they're really good friends of mine. But they're my kid's aunties, right? You see that a lot in Indigenous communities, where the females act in mother roles, grandmother roles, and auntie roles to kids that are not biologically theirs, and that is a good thing—You have the aunties and the uncles, you take on mothering and parenting roles for each other in different ways, even though, technically, they are just really good family friends, or whatever. We support each other by taking on many roles and acting like family.

The Spirit of a Grandmother. The Spirit of a grandmother cultivates play, joy, creativity, spontaneity, and activity. Participant I shared that being a grandmother is one of her biggest joys; when she is with her grandchild, she plays in ways she never would in any other relationship, and the benefits extend beyond love and joy into her physical health through activity:

> When I am with my granddaughter, we play and play. Sometimes, I'll do a little bit of dancing in my living room, which just so happens, is also great physical activity for my

> granddaughter and me. I put on Adam Levine. He's got a good song. We dance and dance and are just free. Just dance how you feel. My granddaughter and I will do that sometimes, but she's shy, so she won't dance in front of Papa or anybody else, but we dance hard. So, we do our own thing. And I just play with my granddaughter and love it. She needs a playmate, so I am happy to do that.

The Spirit of a Grandfather. The data identified the Spirit of a grandfather, which supports the parents by offering child respite, teaching cultural Wisdom, and modelling in a good way, as part of their commitment to breaking the cycle of trauma for their grandchildren. Grandfathers teach strength, empowerment, and self-esteem. Participant T shared that one role he highly values is being a grandparent and teacher to his grandchildren. T teaches them the importance of personal empowerment by teaching them to embrace their voice. He passes on cultural teachings and the Wisdom of living in a good way:

> My family supports my wellness. One of the biggest things that I've seen is that I've kind of rubbed off on them, especially the grandchildren; they don't do without. I am teaching them to be confident and strong and express themselves and their needs; they've always got their voice, but, you know, always in a good way. I said, "You've got a voice, and you've got to use your voice in a good way." I teach the Seven Values and our culture. They are 7, 10, and 11, and I always give them teachings; I have kind of rubbed off on them with my sayings. And, dude, they know when I'm gone, they miss me. They say, "Hey, papa, when are you coming home?" I say, "Friday. Okay. I love you." And they're saying it now. And I've had enough and all that. Yes. Happy just that it's making a change—That's changed stuff … And that's the way a change has to be.

The Spirit of Support

The participants honoured the relations who sustain them in wellness through support. It is through the actions of their relations and how their relations upheld the participants by offering them encouragement, kindness, allyship, truth, acceptance, compassionate listening, and integrity with the Spirit to promote the participants' wellness.

Encouragement. The Spirit of support is offered through encouragement to participants by their relations, which looks like friendly reminders that support balance, reminders of one's personal strengths, reminders of empowerment, and validation. Participant P provided the example of his friends who know him well and can see when he needs encouragement to do things that promote his wellbeing:

> I have friends who encourage me. They know I'm a real introvert; I like to be alone, but that can become a problem, all in balance, right? And so, one will call me up and say, "Hey, P, have you been out of the house, or have you been out of your yard yet, lately? Maybe you should go visit somebody. Maybe you should go to town or go for a meal or go to a movie or go do something. Get out of your little zone there." There are certain friends that will remind you, "Okay. Maybe it's time for you to get moving; you're getting too comfortable, it is time for growth. It's time to push yourself a little bit more."

Kindness. The Spirit of support also comes through kindness. Kindness is expressed through acknowledging one another's strengths, speaking positively, and withholding judgements and negativity. Participant I noted her appreciation for the Spirit of support, which is expressed through kindness:

> That's what I often think about what my friends and family provide to me and what I also do. I have to practice the motto I live by; "Say good things." You may be angry at the person, what they've done to you, or took something from you—Don't say the bad things because they always come back. So, if you can't say nothing nice, don't say nothing at all. Right? Bambi's mom said that. So, continue to practice what we preach. And that's what we tell my girls, "Continue to move forward." And that's what I told his staff here, I said, "Continue to work together as a team, because as a team, you guys are solid and you're strong." So, I said, "Continue to do that. Work together." I said, "None of you are untouchable." And I said, "I'll always be here. I'm in the community. I'm not going nowhere. So, I'm here." I said, "You can utilize me anytime."

Allyship. The Spirit of allyship is an expression of the Spirit of support. The participants defined allyship as support that is offered by reliable and trusting people in one's life who strive alongside, together, working on wellness and who one can turn to for support if they become off-balanced and are struggling to maintain wellness. They are key individuals who are in pursuit of one another's wellness. Participant C explained that she has key individuals in her life who support holistic wellness, including the physical, emotional, and spiritual quadrants:

> I have some really good people who support my wellness, and we connect on a regular basis, and that is part of keeping balance. Sometimes, it's emotional stuff. And sometimes it's more physical or both—but it's always something—We're always getting together to do something physical, and then we get into our emotional, mental, and spiritual stuff. But then we have that little bit of downtime, too, which is important. Or while we're walking or chatting or that kind of stuff when—And then, we're all talking

about other stuff, like some emotional stuff. Sometimes, we get into spiritual conversations with people. So, it's that.

Allyship is also in evidence with Participant T's friends. T felt that his friends are reliable and trusting people who are good for him and his wellness and whom he is able to seek out in a time of need—they will help him continue in wellness:

> My friends. Well, let's put it this way, they are more than friends; they are my lifeline. If you know that person's no good for you, you're not going to hang around with them. I choose people that are good for me and want the best for me. And plus, we want that for each other. I choose people who can teach me and support me; I have knowledgeable, good people in my group.

Participant O explained that allies are also people who know a person well and are close enough to be able to observe when that person needs gentle reminders of self-care. They are people who can gently point out when they notice an imbalance and encourage someone to take steps to regain balance:

> I have many, many ideas, but I have a few people that I bounce ideas off of, and these people remind me of what my capacity is. And sometimes, for myself, I've learned that other people actually know me better than I know myself, and they can see me better than I can see myself. And that's so counter-intuitive, to put the faith of my wellness in my community … It'll be someone who has worked with me and is kind of in the grind with me. He'll just be like, "Hey, I've noticed that you're looking a little bit tired today. Should we end this early?" Or, "You looked 'off' last week, so I brought you a coffee this week," or just—it's those tiny little things that you're—The people around me are

> also working on my own wellness too. We're so prone to be isolationists, and like, "I'm in charge of my own everything. And I am my own kind of tower of power" … We forget that there's people around us who, if we're open and we're supposed to be walking in a good way, we have to acknowledge that they are also watching us and engaging. Our people could be our be our kids. It's going to be our parents. It is going to be our close friends. It could be a number of people. It's going to be the people who have love for us and who are going to know us sometimes better than we know ourselves, so we need to have humility and be like, "Right, yeah, I am tired. I'm actually not going to go to that fourth meeting today." I'm going to send a representative, or I'm just not going to—I'm going to take care and be really mindful of what that looks like with honesty.

Honesty. The Spirit of support is offered through the honesty of one's relations, which transparently expresses wellness-promoting evaluation, critique, and opinion on the participant's life. Participant P shared that his friends support his wellness by offering honesty and truth that he may not always want to hear, but through trust in his friendships, he knows that the messages are in the Spirit of honesty, intended to support his wellness, and that the truth is reciprocated:

> My closest friends and I all practice speaking the truth. Even though it is hard, we know it's from a good place. Speaking the truth to each other. Because they speak the truth, and it forces me to speak my truth. And we're able to help each other grow because I know if I tell you something, then you're going to—If I ask you for feedback, I know it's going to be the truth about what you see in me and what I need to change. So, when I have friends like that, it encourages me to keep on growing, and then, it also helps me to keep on going forward in my emotional well-being as well as the four quadrants to help me to go forward.

Acceptance. Acceptance, when offered with the Spirit of support, promotes the participant's wellness. This does not mean indifference or that truth would not be offered, but it is a baseline place of trust and safety where one can come as they are and will be accepted with warm support and care so they can continue to move forward in wellness. Participant O explained:

> Well, my friends make me feel like I don't have to isolate in order to feel what I'm feeling. I think that's a big one for me … It's people who meet me where I'm at … But then there's those few people that are like, "Hey, you've been MIA for two months." They know I am off. "What are you doing tomorrow? Great. You're free. Let's go for a walk." So that's the difference … They can be there however I show up. I think that's why they're so critical to my mental health.

Compassionate Listening. The Spirit of support is offered through compassionate listening and is kind and attentive care to support the participant's wellness. Participant P shared:

> I keep supportive friends. And if I need to, I can go visit one of them, and I know that will help me out. Just kind of give space. They will say, "Okay." And they allow me to share. They'll just listen and not judge me. So, keeping that in my social circle in a more positive and able to work towards healing.

Integrity. Participants explained that their relations offered support through living their own personal integrity; they live in alignment with wellness and promote the participants to continue moving forward in their wellness with integrity. Participant E shared that part of her wellness has been consciously selecting friends and social relationships, including her workplace, that align with her wellness values and support her integrity:

> Well, I think because all relationships I have are healthy relationships, pretty healthy—I don't have any unhealthy relationships, and if I recognize them, I distance myself from unhealthy situations. So, yeah, I'm usually always looking at the values in things and people's values—you see what they are in situations, and just like what we're talking about—not going backwards [towards unwellness]. So, I would never go back to a place that didn't serve me, really, any good; I wouldn't go back there. It's just growing, I guess—changing with the change and still trying to keep my roots and relationships healthy … I have some good friends, and they're all healthy friends, they all live well. I have a small circle of trusted friends with whom I would talk about things that I would not necessarily talk to other people about. And it's good to—same thing—release and just talk about it and let it go, yeah, and stay healthy that way, I guess, emotionally … The majority of my social network is working with First Nations people, other than my work relationship with RCMP or my contract with FNHA—That's all Indigenous space, and I get to connect with cultural and traditional people. And that's what I enjoy the most.

The Spirit of Contribution

The *Spirit of contribution* was a strong theme for all the participants. Contribution is done with Spirit when it is to promote personal and relational healing wellness. It was clear from the data that there was a direct and reciprocal relationship between contributing to the healing and wellness of one's relations and personal wellness. The Spirit of contribution was provided by participants to their relations through engaging in acts of service that promote other Indigenous people's healing and wellness. Indigenous contribution was offered through sharing Wisdom,

serving as role models, serving as Elders, initiating and providing cultural activities, engaging in Indigenous activism, and providing sustenance.

Participant T exemplified the importance of Indigenous contribution. It is his purpose to serve the people, Indigenous people, his community and nation. His contribution is a source of wellness for himself and others and is a guiding beacon for his life:

> I worked for the people and their healing and wellness all my life, pretty much. No one else. I've never worked for a person. Even my boss, I haven't worked for. I've worked for the betterment of the people. And that's my motto. That's the way, and I am sticking with it. It has never got me in trouble, so hey, it keeps me well, too.

Participant C strives to support the wellness of others who are more marginalized than herself. The reciprocal relationship of contribution, in turn, feeds her Spirit and Indigeneity:

> I do little things that help to balance myself, such as knitting and sewing things that I donate to the nursing home or other causes, donating regularly to a local mission. It is very important for me to do these small things. When I think about that from an Indigenous perspective, it connects with the idea that if I have extras, then I should pass that along to others, or if I have helped someone else achieve, then I will. The Indigenous perspective of doing things to keep the entire community healthy and not just focusing on self.

The Spirit of Healing and Wellness. The Spirit of healing and wellness theme emerged from the data and what it illuminated a direct reciprocal relationship of healing and wellness for oneself and one's relations. Participant B said:

> My work is always in healing and wellness. Like, my last position, I was doing current research on wellness, on crisis response, and bringing people information on what's happening culturally and spiritually in the territory that might be of interest to some. You just never know. I like to be a part of the solution and be there to share any information that I may have, and also to be open to listening to others and what works for them, even when it comes down to things like Traditional Medicines.

Participant C shared that she is committed to contributing to the wellness of her community. She is very discriminating about where she contributes; they need to align with her values and passion and promote her personal wellness; "I contribute to my community and its wellness [which] are all things I am really passionate about, so it's also good for me."

Sharing Wisdom. Participants noted the importance of learning that enhances their wellness, both cultural and contemporary Wisdom, and in sharing that Wisdom with others. Wise teachings are gathered with the purpose to be shared promotes personal and relational wellness. Participant O explained:

> My work right now involves a lot of reading and understanding for myself and my wellness, but of course, it's for others, too. I gather information and integrate it to be part of a meaningful solution. So, summarizing to make sense of the information and make it understandable is something I do at work and with my family and friends; I gain knowledge to share. It is a pattern—receive, learn, and give. I used to have boxes and boxes of books, but I moved them around and decided I better just let someone else read them. Let them go.

Participant P described the circular process as follows:

> I learned this from my cousin. We were doing a ceremony, and people started arguing about the sharing the ceremony. She said something that kind of stuck with me, and it's still stuck with me today. And she said, "If this is such a powerful ceremony or teaching, why do we want to keep it a secret? Why can't we share it with everybody? Because wouldn't that Ceremony of Wisdom change the world?" … And so, I've always kind of kept that and said, "Why do we have to keep it a secret? Why can't we use it and let everybody use it? And it will change the world."

Wellness Role Model. The participants shared how they strive to be role models, which is another manifestation of the Spirit of contribution. They actively promote healing and wellness in their community by modelling themselves as a source of inspiration for others. Their life and how it is lived is a wellness contribution. Participant C shared that she aspires to role model living wellness for her family and community:

> I sit on Council. I'm involved in my community, and it is important to be visible and a role model … I like to help promote good, healthy living in the community. I like to inspire people to do the best that they can do by me also doing that … Again, it's like bringing along people and having them participate in activities and showing them how to do things that they're like, "Oh, I never—" We've taken friends camping who are like, "I don't know anything about camping." And we're like, "Well, come camping with us then, I will show you." So, it's like all of those. It's, like, being that support person, being that person who just kind of brings other people along. And it's like, "Come on, come with us. Do this with us. Or try this out. And if you don't like it after, then that's OK." I

> don't really think of myself as a role model. I just think of myself as somebody who likes to share stuff and who likes to support other people in things that they want to do.

Embodying an Elder. The Spirit of an Elder holds and shares Wisdom that promotes Indigenous healing and wellness, as revealed in the Spirit of the Elder theme above. An Elder is determined by one's relations by requesting that individuals share their Wisdom for the betterment of other Indigenous people. One explicit example demonstrated the embodiment of an Elder as an important act of the Spirit of contribution.

Participant T moved through his own exploration of what the Spirit of an Elder is, compared to the Western concept of a senior or old person. He struggles with his own identity as he is called on to take the role of an Elder. His ultimate goal is a contribution to Indigenous healing and wellness, and that is the Spirit of the Elder he is living intuitively and embodying an Elder:

> I am scared to be an Elder. I have seen people retire and do nothing, and I do not want that. I'm trying to make people healthy here, and that's my goal 'til I die. That's all I'm going to do. I am not sure I can consider myself an Elder, but people call me that. What is an Elder? I'm still trying to learn the process. People say, "Well, you are one." I said, "Well, maybe someday." For some reason, I'm still missing something there. I am old enough to be one. But I don't want to stop doing my work. I think it's because I've got more to give to the people, and after that, I think I might become an Elder. You know what I mean? Hmm. But Elders always give; back in the day, people would go to them for Wisdom, they were more valued, so maybe I don't want to become an old person or a senior, where you are not giving and sharing and just retire. I don't want that.

Culture. Participants engage in the Spirit of contribution offered by offering cultural support, practices, ceremonies, and rituals for others that have a reciprocal effect on one's personal wellness. Participant I shared that a big part of her wellness is cultural contribution, sharing her family's cultural gifts with other Indigenous people:

> We go when asked to drum and sing, like, somebody wants us to come from a dinner or they have an anniversary or something, but other times you get asked to come and sing a song, usually at a funeral. But we've been asked to drum and sing at quite a few dinners. And so, we enjoy that, it's good for our wellness, too.

Activism. Participants demonstrated that the Spirit of contribution is offered through activism, which is targeted at Indigenous activism that promotes Indigenous healing and wellness. Participant I shared that engaging with the Spirit of activism promoted her wellness by enhancing her Indigenous pride:

> And there were a lot of things where we talked about what makes me proud to be Indigenous, fighting for my rights, not to be afraid to say what's on my mind, but never come across as being slanderous or racist. And I always say, "this is without prejudice." And as long as you let them know, I'm not attacking. I'm just saying that you put your feet in my shoes and walk. How far do you think you're going to get when you get those attacks? And make them think … So, it's just finding your voice and then joining your voice, I guess. Women have a voice now, whereas years ago, we didn't.

Participant P brought to life the Spirit of contribution through activism by advocating for the natural world and fighting against environmental exploitation:

> I really started to see how our wellness is Nature's wellness. It is going back to Natives as the keepers of the Earth. I do my best to speak up about tree-cutting, I do my best to talk about the mining issues and then, the dirty water, and all that kind of stuff, to be able to speak for Mother Earth.

Spirit of Sustenance. The Spirit of contribution is offered through practicing food sovereignty and providing naturally acquired food sources to other Indigenous people who could benefit, supporting the individual's wellness. Participant P promotes his physical and cultural engagement while also providing food for Indigenous mothers:

> That is one thing that I love to do, dip-netting. I stay physically fit so I can keep fishing into old age … And, as soon as I hear the salmon are coming, I'm down there. I live down there … When I go fishing, I mostly give away all my fish … I give it to—mostly, my biggest thing is giving it to single moms with children because I know what it—My mom was a single mom struggling to raise four of us, and so I've kind of a soft spot for single moms raising their kids. So, I give a lot of stuff to them.

The Spirit of Personal Wellness. Personal wellness refers to engagements or activities that are intentional and conscious that promote one's personal wellness. As Participant O stated; "Living with an awareness of your intentions, that is part of being Indigenous—having the knowledge and being really mindful that that is what you're doing and why."

Personal wellness was articulated through the balance model: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. There were a myriad of contemporary, unorthodox, and creative ways that participants used to achieve the elements of balance, and many examples were highly integrated.

The Spirit of Physical Wellness. Physical wellness is a wellness activity that takes place with the inspiration to nurture and care for the physical self and body, as exemplified in the excerpts below. Most of the data spoke to physical activity, including fitness, sports, or movement; however, two non-activity-related physical domains arose; physical environment and nutrition. Another theme that emerged that is woven with physical activity is a connection to culture and nature.

Balanced Sleep. One participant noted sleep as being prioritized for their physical health. To support her sleep hygiene, Participant E used sleep meditations on her phone to support her sleep practice:

> I'd say [meditation] calms my mind down for sleep, and it's just for my own balance. Meditation for sleep helps me achieve what my grandmother taught; I think it's kind of in line with what my grandmother would say about making sure you have good sleep and that your body needs rest. So, it's kind of that way.

Balanced Diet. Participants noted the importance of integrating traditional and whole foods into one's diet to promote physical wellness. Participant I shared the importance of eating well:

> My diet is mainly around the moose, the deer, or the elk. We will eat poultry, but we have a hard time eating beef now for various reasons. If we do, we feel and taste the difference, so it's more about the traditional meats that we get off the land. And last year we grew a garden, so we had lettuce and nice fresh lettuce. So, anything that was in the ground, we thought, "Okay, it's ours" and so we seldom bought store-bought stuff … Then we would start harvesting our tomatoes, salsa, peaches, and all that. But we love the

> berries off the land. So, we do the berry picking, especially our *hoosham*. It's a soapberry for, I guess, our Western people that don't know what it is. And that's—I call it a body cleanser.

Traditional Medicine. Participants looked to traditional Medicines to support their physical health. Participant I shared her inner dialogue and questioned her colonized impulses, like grabbing for Western medicine at the first sign of a headache. The self-inquiry is imperative and allows her to slow down and check in with what she truly needs to support her wellness:

> I always have to talk myself through things. When I feel like I'm sick—and we talked about the Medicines—I try to not go to the medicine cabinet; I'm going to get Dristan or whatever that is up there. I have to talk to me and ask me, "Do you need that or are you really sick that you do need it?" And so, I question myself. And I can't say that I'm 100 percent off of those. But, if I'm really feeling sick, I said, "I need something just to—so I can sleep." And so, I question myself a lot. But, once I do that, then I awaken and go full stream on my Traditional Medicines.

Avoidance or Limited Engagement with Colonial Substances. Participants explained their relationship with colonial substances, which are substances that came with colonization, such as alcohol. Participants such as Participant E expressed either abstinence or very occasional limited use in a social setting for pleasure:

> As I said earlier, I don't do drugs and alcohol—[I] have lived a healthy life that way just because I grew up with it. My mom never drank either, but my dad was an alcoholic, so I just chose not to engage in that life; it has caused so much pain, I stay away from it. So,

> all my life I've never been interested in it—I think that [is] one main thing for being healthy.

Participant O stated, "I don't drink very often. I'll occasionally go out for a drink with some people for social gatherings. It's very rare."

Movement. Movement was highlighted as an important element of physical balance. As Participant O shared, she engages in different forms of physical activity, and she strives to keep it new and exciting; "I walk a lot, I do kickboxing. I just bought a big heavy bag. So, I'm going to be putting that up in my house just to mix it up a little bit. I dance."

Sports. Participant P shared that he engages in physical activity for personal wellness through sport and exercise, which is integral to wellness. He acknowledged that the luxuries afforded in contemporary life to support physical fitness are a privilege:

> Hockey supported my wellness. I started to learn about the Alkali Braves, and I don't know if you've heard about them. And so, that was one of my inspirations. And so, when I saw that picture, I was like, "Wow. These guys were really physically fit." They walked, they ran, they snowshoed. They did all kinds of things just to be in totally good shape. And so, I was thinking, "I can't really complain. I can go to a gym and be warm and go on a treadmill, and I can do the StairMaster and be in total comfort." Whereas, back in their day, they didn't have any StairMasters or treadmills or anything, and they just did it. And so, I'm thinking, "Wow. Wow."

Walking Outside. The physical quadrant for wellness can be supported by a wide range of movements, and participants advocated for simple activities such as walking. Participant I shared that she enjoys walking outside for her physical health; "I always have loved walking, but

in springtime, I have a hard time because of the pollen that flies around. And it's thick this year. So, I continue to walk when I can."

Engagement with Nature. Participant C shared that she connects to nature, which promotes engagement in physical activity as part of her lifestyle. She explained that engagement with nature serves secondary functions, including relational connection, adventure, and emotional well-being, as well:

> So, it's like being out in nature, and that keeps us active. We just walked our dogs at one of our favorite places to walk. A lot of the activities that we do involve being outside, like camping and being connected to the natural world, and appreciation and being able to share that. Again, it's another thing we share with our grandchildren who love camping. We've already scheduled, like, two camping trips for them for this summer because they love coming camping with us. We also schedule outdoor activities with them to be able to do that. Nature is super important to me, and that's where I go to get myself right; out for walks, out in nature, and out paddling. And it's where I challenge myself, enjoy myself, connect with all kinds of people, and nature, the land. So, yeah. Like, that's a really big piece for me.

The Spirit of Mental Wellness. All participants noted the importance of strategies and approaches to care for their mental well-being. Participants noted the importance of an intentional and conscious life, including the state of one's environment, the example given of cleanliness, engagement with physical activity for the purpose of mental wellness, routine mental wellness practices, ceremonies, Wise-teachings, cultural learning, personal growth, and living with a mind state of trust, which all support mental wellness.

Cleanliness. A clean and organized environment was said to promote and be a sign of mental wellness. Participant P understands that the physical environment is an external representation of someone's internal world and wellness, a direct reflection and extension of the self. With that understanding, P cares about and respects his physical surroundings, such as his house and yard. He shared that his wellness is connected to the environment, and keeping what is physically around him clean and organized helps care for his internal health:

> At my house, well, I do my best to keep it garbage-free so that my environment, where I'm at, where I sleep, where I lay my head down, it is clean and it's not cluttery or not really garbagy and all that kind of stuff, so that it helps me to keep my mindset and my body clear and clean. Because it's kind of like they say, Native people are the keepers of the Earth. But then, when we go on reserve, it's one of the worst places there is for garbage … Yeah. And then, so, I'm like, well, we say that, that Indigenous people are stewards of mother earth, but look at the reserves. We don't practice it. So, I do my best with my yard to keep it clean and—yeah. Just so that I will be sleeping in a clean place and my mental and all that will be clean.

Physical Activity. Participants spoke about the importance of physical activity in the Spirit of mental wellness. Participant O has created a life with inherent activity, so it is not even an option to opt out, and it sets her up for regular success. O takes a moment to acknowledge and feel the goodness and success of her achievements, and in that way, with every goal checked off, she also has a moment of personal acknowledgment of the small but significant wins, which all contributed to her mental health:

> I think it's the high you get after doing physical activity that is so important, and that's why I do it, it really is good for mental health, as is routine … It's seeing those little rings close on your phone [on your fitness tracker], on your apps. It's that sense of accomplishment in something, even small, that I note. I also make it so that it's not possible for me to do something. The dog needs to be walked, and the dog is an active dog. I need to get to the beach. It's become such a habit that it has to happen. And now, it's good. It's happening. It's here. It's done. It just becomes a part of your routine.

Routine Mental Wellness Practices. Participants noted the importance of routines that promote mental wellness, which are practiced every day. Habitual but simple practices and routines contribute to mental wellness. It is interesting to note that many of the routine mental wellness practices are integrated with strands of spiritual and physical quadrants; however, participants noted the primary intention of routine practices was to support mental wellness. Participant P outlined his routine, which set him up for a good day with positive thoughts and a connection to Spirit. The cold water or Smudge creates a space and experience for prayer and intention setting to live in a good way:

> Without fail, I have a cold shower or a cold bath every day, every morning before I leave my house. And, during that cold shower or cold bath, I ask the Creator to guide me throughout this day, ask the Creator to make my hands healing hands and my words be healing words and words of encouragement and to be able to think positive thoughts and have a positive attitude towards anyone that comes into my space. That's something that I do every day, without fail. And then, I Smudge up. Not on a regular basis, maybe I'll be

> lucky maybe once or twice a week. Yeah. But the cold shower and the cold bath, I do it every day.

Ceremony. Ceremonies cultivate discipline, respect, and humility, which are essential for mental wellness. The participants noted that ceremonies are a great place to learn and practice these important mental capacities. While ceremonies are spiritual, they are highly integrated mental wellness-promoting activities that build mental resilience and discipline that carry over into one's everyday life. Participant B shared the importance of engagement with intentional spiritual practices like a ceremony that instills imperative mental wellness values such as respect, discipline, and humility:

> When it comes to ceremony and spirituality, that itself is a lot of disciplinary work for the mind. For participants in the ceremony, it's expected that, as a participant, you're not going to be speaking out of turn and that you're going to be speaking with respect and humility. And that discipline itself, a lot of that comes from the mind. Control what you say, control what you think at that time. And it's a healing movement that happens when you're able to do that.

Wise Teachings. Participants shared the importance of constantly seeking Wise-teachings and were creative in their pursuit of engaging with ongoing learning for personal wellness. Participants differentiated between Wise-teachings and other teachings, in terms of the purpose of the teaching. Wise-teachings are Wise because they promote personal and relational wellness. The data highlighted the necessity of continuous learning to live in wellness through books, podcasts, courses and the like. Participant C explained that teachings provide a mental challenge

that she enjoys, and they inspire her to continue to better her wellness and enhance others' wellness, too:

> So, I do a lot of reading. I like to take courses. So, I'll just take a free course or something. Right now, I'm taking a fool's medicine course just because I am really interested in that. And I'll do a lot of stuff around gardening. I love to do research and learn stuff, right? Yeah. Right now, I'm planning to build a food forest in our community. I manage our community garden. And our community garden is pretty well set. And so, now there's another piece of property in our community. And so, we're talking about building a food forest there. And the idea of planning it out, and that is really like—Those are sort of my mental gymnastics kinds of things I do. It's like reading and planning anything that supports our wellness and trying to figure out how to incorporate what I've read into what I want to do.

Participant P shared that he gathers Wise-teachings from books to shed light on the limitations of his current knowledge and expand beyond the limited colonial paradigm; he tried to decolonize his mental and emotional aspects of self, which support his emotional and mental wellness. P gathered teachings from contemporary sources, such as books and the Internet. Participant P shared that another teaching he gathered taught him why it is important to continuously gather teachings, which is to honour the people in one's life and to continuously develop oneself so one can be a source of wellness for others:

> I like to read stuff that is new and challenges my mental thoughts; any lesson or teaching is Wise if it supports me in healing and being well. Yeah. And it's for my mental well-being to be able to push my thoughts to the edge. This one book that I started reading, it's

> called *Open relationships*, and I started reading it because I have two children that are—I have one child that is transgender, and I have another child that is non-binary. I learned all about that to be a better father. I didn't know that. And me, being old school, I just—there's male and female, and that's it. But my twins say, "No, Dad, that's not going to be." So, I've been learning about what that is; transgender, non-binary, open relationships. I am being open-minded and trying.

Participant T shared that he gathers teachings from books, often recommended by people he respects and admires. This is a contemporary way to integrate knowledge and bring it to life. Living in wellness is a continuous pursuit of gathering teachings for personal growth to integrate them into one's life:

> I got a really good book now. It's about love and transformation. And I've got another one, my grandfather introduced it to me. I just kind of ordered it on Amazon. It's about passion and the transformation. It is interesting … As I always say, you need to continue to pick up tools along the way and then you introduce it to yourself to make yourself a better human being. That, I've never learned when I was younger. So, I just kind of say, "Okay. Well, I think I need that." So, I'll do my homework and read it, and then live it.

Participant C shared that she gathers teachings from many contemporary sources, such as podcasts and books, that enhance personal growth and healing and allow her to learn about contemporary psychology. Participant C also gathered teachings on gardening and nature that root her in a contemporary way to gather Indigenous-aligned knowledge; she looked for inspirational stories to encourage herself and build resiliency:

> I read lots of stuff about food as Medicine. Sometimes, I just read for pleasure because sometimes—I also listen to a lot of audiobooks. So, I recently listened to Unwinding Anxiety, right? So, like, recognizing what makes you anxious. So, I listen to some podcasts about women in ADHD and how that impacts what we do. And gardening stuff, I love gardening stuff. It is like a real passion of mine. I love audiobooks about people who've pushed themselves through. Oh, I can't remember the name of it. It's a really great book about this woman who cycles. And so, listening to that and just how it's not just physical, like, it's a mental thing that you have to do. So yeah, those kinds of inspiring stories of resilience. And another one was a guy who paddled in Northern Ontario. He paddles unknown rivers. So, he explores them, finds them, and then paddles them. So, I love those kinds of things that are like—make you really think about that mental over physical and pushing yourself.

Participant I shared that she gathers teachings from contemporary sources such as books, and she seeks out spiritual and new age philosophies resonant and that promote her Indigenous perspectives, such as holism.

Cultural Learning. The data illuminated the fact that cultural learning supports mental wellness, which is the process of learning via cultural approaches, such as stories and seeking Wisdom from the Spirit within all one's relations. According to Participant T:

> Most of the animals got messages. As I always say, most people have too much going on up here [in their mind], too much chatter; when you go to nature and quiet your mind with the purpose of hearing what you need to hear, you will get the lessons you need. But

> most people can't hear whatever that animal is saying; their minds are too busy. For example, the owl is my mentor to me. They tell me shit.

Participant C shared that she routinely seeks teachings for her mental wellness through audiobooks. She explained that the verbal delivery of an audiobook is consistent with an oral approach to teachings, and it is, therefore, a contemporary, culturally adapted way to gather teachings:

> Audiobooks, learning, and listening are great for mental health. Like, I find, when I think about it, I really got into audiobooks to listen. And I mean, that's how our teachings are done, right? It is oral. So, I do find, when I do that kind of oral listening as opposed to reading, I tend to retain it more. For Indigenous people, that oral history, that oral way of teaching, it's relevant.

Participant O shared that she looks to fantasy stories as a way to gain teachings and promote mental wellness. The stories bring excitement and connection in a relevant way to her Indigenous identity, as O understands storytelling to be integral to Indigeneity:

> I love my podcasts. And again, it's that thing of hearing people. And it's like you have these people in your ear while you're pottering around the house … It's absolutely storytelling. I think it's a connection. It's hearing people's voices and interpretations and knowing like, "You know what, someone else is going to tell me the story in a little different way in a couple of weeks." And that's going to be so interesting for me to pick it apart and figure out for myself where I land on some of these issues.

Participant P shared that he seeks teachings that improve himself and his relationships for his mental wellness that also have a cyclical impact on his relations. He sought out a book on

truth and honesty. Through reading and learning about the importance of honesty and truth in relationships, he embodied the teachings in his life, which have fostered closeness and trust with his most important relationships, those with his children:

> With my children, we're close. We're close, close, and that is so important … There was this book that I read by Alice Miller, *The truth shall set you free*. I read to improve myself. In reading that book, I now always practice speaking the truth to the best of my ability, and I do that with my children and my grandchildren.

***Personal Growth*.** The data revealed that participants intentionally sought out personal growth opportunities by learning new things and engaging in new experiences, to continue promoting their mental wellness for themselves and their relationships. Participant O shared that she continually seeks new experiences for personal development and mental wellness. These experiences required her to embrace being a beginner and to lean into vulnerability and fear, which are necessary for ongoing learning and personal growth:

> It is important always to be learning and challenging yourself, be okay with putting yourself out there and sucking at new things. And I'm looking at my Ph.D. now. And my brain is kind of opening up a little bit in a different way and trying to figure out, okay, how do I put myself out there—I don't want to put myself in very easy situations either. I like a challenge. I am not looking forward to dance hall with 20-year-olds. That is terrifying. But I'm going to go, and I'm going to have a great time. I was terrified to do singing, and I went to my second lesson, and things were great. I try really hard to do things that are outside the box, but it builds resilience and tenacity.

State of Trust. The data brought forward the state of trust, which is living with a deep trust in Spirit. A mindset rooted in trust provides a solid foundation for mental wellness; Participant P shared that he learned the importance of trusting, which promotes his mental wellness. The trust he cultivated eased tension, fear, and worried thoughts, and now he lives with more acceptance and gratitude for what is:

> And [*unnamed*] told me something about a year ago, and I've been practicing it for my mental wellness, is to trust in the process. So, just every day, letting—Just say, "Okay." And my brother would say, "Okay. Well, let the Creator guide you through this day." And I'm like, "Huh? Okay." Because I like to plan my day and say, "Okay. This is what I'm going to do." And then, now I say, "Okay. Trust the process. Let God or Creator plan your day." And usually, it works out really well. And at the end of the day, I can say, "Oh, this day was a real great day today. I enjoyed this day."

The Spirit of Emotional Wellness. The participants' data discussed the creative and adaptive ways they care for their emotional wellness, spanning such elements as offering themselves love, caring for and being with their emotional pains, enforcing boundaries, connecting to humour, and self-awareness that would enable them to have the Wisdom to recognize when their emotional wellbeing is off balance and presenting as problematic coping. The data differentiated the emotional quadrant from the mental quadrant by looking for the intention to care for one's feelings and focusing on 'feelings,' which are emotions. Emotions are embodied and felt in the mind and body. Participants drew from approaches such as meditation, spiritual practices, stories, physical activities, social connection, and cultural activities such as drumming to care for their emotional wellness.

Processing Emotions. The participants took essential actions to process their emotional experiences. Life inherently creates a spectrum of emotions, and emotions require care and attention to be fully honoured and felt to be processed. As Participant P explained, "There's been a lot of deaths around here, so, pain. I've lost three friends lately, so I've just kind of been like, "Okay, P, don't go off the deep end here. Just go through the pain, feel the pain to go through the pain and heal."

Participant B shared that teachings gathered throughout her lifetime have taught her the importance of inviting emotional pain to process as life has unavoidable challenges. B notes the importance of being mindful of the emotions, accepting their presence, allowing them to be there and feeling them in an embodied way, to move beyond them:

> Recently, there's been so much trauma in communities. There's a lot of grief and loss. And I've experienced the loss of family because of deaths that were untimely, overdosing and others. And it's just really hard on the well-being, emotional well-being, spiritual well-being … First of all, letting out the emotions, letting out the sounds or the tears that come along with emotional pain. Then, I will discuss some of the mindfulness teachings that I've received over time. And that could be something that I heard in a workshop or something I've heard from my grandma. It just comes across differently, right? It's just something you recognize and notice, and that's part of mindfulness. And I guess, for me, it includes a little bit of being okay with going through some emotions, like a whole range of emotions that come flooding by, and sometimes you can't hold it in, so to speak. I was talking to my mom about that one time, and I don't know what the situation was.

> Anyway, I said to her that it's okay to cry. It's okay because you build it up and build it up, and then it comes up when you don't expect it to.

Participant C also shared the importance of experiencing and processing painful emotions:

> A good cry every once in a while never hurts; it's imperative. Yeah. So, again, it's about recognizing that, right, recognizing it and being able to name it and let it be what it is, like, letting yourself be angry about whatever, letting yourself be sad or upset. Like, my thing is never to get stuck there, like, to try to, like, "Okay, this is where it is. This is what it is right now." And yeah, but not getting stuck there. And with my emotions, I'm very—like, I need to say it. I need to say it out loud. And sometimes, I say it out loud to myself. So, I will have a conversation with myself just so I can work it through. Yeah. So, I'll talk it out to myself. Or a lot of times, it'll be like, I'll go for a walk, and I'll be, like, talking about it, and thinking about it, and then just really letting myself feel it, right, and then recognizing where I'm feeling it; "So, where is it getting me? Is it, like, right in my gut?" or recognizing, understanding that stress and anxiety.

Participant T shared that caring for emotional pain is important, and to do that, he gravitates to cultural drumming. When T hears drumming, it's a calling for healing. For him, drumming is a source of spiritual connection and a way to release pain and feel a sense of togetherness that all support emotional wellbeing as an integrated experience:

> If I hear the drum and I'm over there, I'd sit there, and I'll sit there even if I don't know how to do it. But I'll be sitting there. I think it's because of the traditional ways that I've been talking. Drumming is a tool that we need that, spiritually, kind of helps you release the emotional pains. When you drum, it feels like we are all drumming at the same time,

> and there is something in that. Drumming is soothing. It also takes a lot of the pain in a spiritual sense. And it's Medicine. It's Medicine for all of us. We just have to start thinking about it better.

Diverse Tools and Approaches. Participants had individually created a toolbox of resources that they could draw on at any given time to rebalance and promote their emotional wellness. The approaches ranged from grounding practices to music and engagement with new-age contemporary spirituality. Spirituality pops up again within this data theme, as do reading and learning, which surfaced in the mental quadrant; however, the inspiration for engagement with the activity in this instance is for emotional care, and the spiritual and mental benefit is secondary.

Participant O shared that she has a diverse set of activities to support her emotional well-being and rebalance, ranging from music, reading and learning, new age Spiritual engagement, poetry, mindfulness practices, and diverse cultural practices, and she has a spiritual space in her house. She can return when a rebalance is needed:

> There are certain things that I do for emotional well-being. I have a playlist for downtime when I need to go to sleep. So, I know that I have certain routines I need to do in order to unwind, and music is a huge one for me. Music is so, so important because it takes away that extra stuff. I'm trying to read more. I just want to read weird policy papers. And I'm like, "Well, what are they doing about harm reduction in the interior?" and just weird things like that—I can't. I'm trying really hard to put those away and just pick up a book of poetry or something completely different to shift gears. But mindfulness is good. I have my tarot cards and affirmation cards that I will pull out once in a while. I have my

> little altars. I have my Santeria stuff from my grandma that she used to do in Mexico, which I kind of continue to do, but I do some of the things for that. I have my own kind of hybrid Indigenous. I have my Smudge.

Participant E shared that she finds gifts from emotional wellness-promoting sources. She seeks out resources such as YouTube to connect with diverse ancient Wisdom teachings, new age content, and religious faiths with her cultural and traditional spiritual foundation and integrates them to support her in morning and evening meditation, reflecting, and prayer rituals:

> For emotional wellness, I do a lot of meditation, so I kind of mix the old ways with the new ways. I do prayers all the time, every day, morning and night. That's what I learned from my grandparents; I do that. And just to, I guess, keep up with the modern world, I have to—Everybody's always in such a rush, and like any job, everybody's in a hurry to go nowhere. Part of my time to practice being quiet and have a good sleep is when I do meditation every night. I just play it on my phone, and that's my routine to shut my mind off and allow my body to have a good sleep … Right now, I've been doing—Since the pandemic, some Catholic rosaries came out [online]. I do those a few times a week. And then I like the John Moyer—My niece showed me … He's a Vietnamese—a Buddha guy. He's always on YouTube. But I like listening to him. He talks about just being in the present moment and recognizing your breath. That's kind of what I practice, too, now, is just noticing if I'm holding my breath during certain times and just being in the present moment. I find that I have to practice and really check myself to make sure that I'm doing that. And it's just part of being in this day and age when it's so busy. There's really no enjoyment, I guess, or acknowledging yourself unless you make yourself do it now.

Therapy and Support Groups. The participants shared that they engage in psychotherapy or support groups for emotional wellness. Participant E noted that therapy is a regular part of her wellness practice:

> I do counselling. So, I've been doing counselling, and then, I ended up being involved in a couple of support groups, which I still regularly participate in, and they're helpful. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So, I make sure to keep up with those things … There, I'm learning how to acknowledge what I'm going through and how to release things, and to say things out loud is helpful … I think, for me, that's a really important piece. It is like to be able to just be—to recognize it, be okay with it, go through it … I'll start unpacking the layers, like, "Why is this making you so upset?"

Meditation. The participants engaged in mediation practice, both formal and informal, for their emotional well-being. Participant I shared that she practices meditation every morning and incorporates Traditional Wisdom about the importance of water or nature sounds to enhance the meditation experience:

> I took a training down in Burnaby years ago, and that was one thing was a project that we had to do to a group of 20, and this was a strict training, and so our training went late, late into the night, and we had to come up with a plan on how—I had never meditated before, and I had to think, so I just relaxed and thought, "Oh, this must be meditation."
>
> And I meditate every morning. I meditate, and that is just to ground me. If I have a bad dream at night, I have to ask myself, "What's going on? Why am I dreaming and why are these people that have passed on coming?" And so, I kind of just meditate to reground myself … So, you just have to relax and ground yourself and your feet on the floor, and I

> always just bring in the animal sounds or water, because water is what we were in before we came into the world. So, water is healing, and I always had a glass of water beside me. So, that was something that I always done.

Participant B shares a complementary story where she had the idea one night while she was struggling to sleep with a busy mind to find a sleep meditation on her phone on YouTube; "I was having a hard time sleeping with a busy mind, so I got my phone, and I was going to do a relaxation meditation, put you to sleep kind of thing … Well, the title said something like, fall asleep in 15 minutes. And I said, oh, that sounds good."

The Practice of Presence. The participants strive to practice presence in their daily lives to support emotional wellness through a myriad of approaches. Participant T illustrated a fundamental perspective for emotional wellness; a present orientation to life, which he noted takes practice and intentionality:

> That's what I consider wellness now. Because, in the past, to me, it's living just what we're doing today. It's what we're doing. It's what we're doing now that counts more than anything else. And people will say, "Well, what are we doing now?" I said, "Well, what are you doing now?" I said, "You're talking to me. We've got to stay in that, right here, not left or right or back."

Participant B shared how she has understood life within a circle concept, that within the circle is only now, presence, outside the circle is life residues that are not wellness-promoting, and within the circle is the present moment, one's strengths and gifts:

> Over the past 15 years, I came up with this concept of the space inside the circle, without direction, without harm, it's without a lot of things. Just like the idea that there's no use

> living in the past, it's gone. What you have is now. It's building on some of those principles from the past as well, knowing who you are, where you came from, what you have overcome, and what your potential is. But basically, the outlook for wellness, for really working through some type of trauma or some kind of difficulty, doesn't matter how intense. It's just remembering that space inside the circle. Time is that little space you're in.
>
> I guess this circle practice has similar ties to meditation. So, you're there, you're quiet, and you're surrounding yourself—Well, I am, anyway. Thinking about bringing the strength and the Spirit and the light of my Ancestors to be with me in that moment. And by putting that in my mind, the feeling resonates through my body to calm whatever energy I'm feeling.

Participant T shared that, for him, sports are a practice of presence. While sports also arose in the physical quadrant, this topic resurfaces again to meet the emotional quadrant as it cultivates presence. Ross lived the value of presence for life through playing sports. Sports facilitate in-the-moment presence to life that comes naturally during sports that Participant T strives to cultivate in his life outside of sports:

> One of the biggest things is I stay in the moment. Practice. Practice. Stay in the moment. And that's why I think I like sports; you are in the moment. I'd go anywhere to play. And that's what kept me great. It kind of saved my life, pretty well, most of the time. And I enjoyed it. Somebody says, "Well, let's go." I'd be saying, "Okay, where are we going?" Even though I wasn't well. But that's sports, and it's—You could tell the difference

between a person that don't play sports and then just everyday life skills. You know that? I really noticed that.

Boundaries. Participants explained the essential nature of boundaries for emotional wellness. Personal boundaries are established to discern whether people can be in one's life or not, depending on their wellness or harmful impact and also to discern what is okay and not okay. Participants expressed the feeling that enforcing boundaries is a challenge, and that it is imperative to enforce boundaries with care and love when possible. It is not about controlling others but, rather, communicating what is okay and not okay for oneself and one's wellness. Participants emphasized the use of non-violent communication to articulate boundaries and relied on their connection to spirituality to facilitate the detachment from others' emotional residue. Spirituality and emotional wellness emerge as a highly integrated relationship within this theme. Participant T expressed the thought that boundaries are paramount to maintaining emotional wellness:

> Boundaries. You have to know your boundaries, okay? What is ok and good for you and what hurts you, and create the boundary. That's one thing I've learned. Another one is how to say no in a good way because, if you don't, hey, you'll be burnt out, and your wellness will plummet. I've seen people two years into a job or sobriety; they've lost, and that's it. They are all gung-ho for two years, and after that, you look around and ask, "Where the hell did they go?"

Participant T exemplifies the integrated nature of spirituality with boundaries to support emotional wellness. He shared two approaches that support him with professional boundaries in his role as a counsellor:

> Another one is that one of the biggest things that keeps me really, really in a good way is a Creator to remind me of the difference between what to carry and what to carry. I always turn everything over to Creator. I have heard so many stories as a counsellor, and I always make sure that after, I pray to Creator to put the stories in a place where it doesn't do any harm. And another one is that to stay in this [counselling] business, we have to say, "What's mine is mine, and what's yours is yours." And learn little things of how to give it back when you go outside the office. I just shake the hands of those I support and thank you for sharing your words, and when I shake their hand, in my mind, I know I am respectfully giving them their story; it is not mine to carry; it's theirs, and that's respect. It's just a little thing, but that's given back. I know that's given back. That's not mine. You just got to work on those practices. I'll help them work on their stories and pain, but it's not mine to keep.

Self-Inquiry. Participants practiced self-inquiry. Self-inquiry is the regular and consistent check-in with oneself to understand how one is feeling, to look for alignment, and to offer care. Participant P shared how he maintains self-awareness by checking in and noticing if he is falling into any patterns of escape, numbing, or avoiding the present moment:

> I have multiple "addictions", so I keep those in check. I struggle with my food addiction, my sugar addiction, and my social media addiction. So, I keep those at a—Sometimes they get out of control, and sometimes I have it in check. It depends on how stressful my day was. I find that, if I have a really stressful day, I'm going to eat a lot of chocolate … I'm just going to go out of whack. It's like going on an alcohol binge … I've recognized that, so I've been keeping track of my addictions because I don't tell people. I always

> practice what I preach to the best of my ability. And so, with all my addictions that I have, I know which ones are my main problems, and I have to keep those not under control because I know I can't really control them sometimes. When I notice them creep in, I go to my routines and check in so I can get rebalanced, stop coping, and start living again.

Participant C shared that she engages regularly with self-inquiry to check if her emotions and thoughts may be out of balance with the present situation:

> [I'll ask myself] "What's creating this situation where you're feeling the way that you're feeling?" And then I'll just start unpacking the layers and looking at, "Okay. Is there somebody else involved in this situation? Is this situation opening some old trauma or old hurt?" Right. "Are you reacting to this new situation based on a previous emotional reaction to something?" Right, so unpacking that. And so, those are the kinds of like—And then, I'll start talking; "Okay. So, what are you going to do about that?" Like, there are certain things you can't fix. You can't change somebody else. "So, what are you going to do for yourself to be able to work through that or to continue to—?" If it's somebody you have to keep working with, like, "How are you going to do that? How are you going to just emotionally get past that piece and then just move on to the next thing?" That's how I talk to myself, because we can all get stuck in that sort of emotional whirlpool. And so, I'm trying to stop it before it gets into a real spirally thing.

Self-Love. The participants brought forward self-love as essential to emotional wellness, which is loving all of oneself and all that makes one inherently human and worth loving. For example, Participant P shared that it was essential for him to learn to love himself:

> I always tell myself I love myself just the way I am. I do that every day. And just to do it. At first, it was really difficult to say, "Patrick, I love you just the way you are." And to do that, at first, it was like, "That's really stupid." But it is not; after a while, it feels good.

Spiritual Practices. The participants engaged in spiritual practices for emotional well-being. While spirituality is a quadrant on its own, spirituality can also be engaged with in the Spirit of emotions. The primary intention for spirituality is, sometimes, to care for one's emotions. Spirituality is emotional care. As Participant P shared, he engages in regular, intentional spiritual practices for his overall wellness and balance, but sometimes specifically as a method to process and release emotional residues:

> Having a Sweat on a regular basis. Going in there and just kind of letting go of necessary emotions. The experience is kind of de-stressing, but it allows you to just let go of stuff in life and pray about it. So, I've been doing that quite a bit around with my friend [*unnamed*] and then [*unnamed*]. And then, with my own Sweat, having my own Sweat helps a lot. And so, having that part of me, the spiritual part of me is grounded. And then also having to smudge up, smudging on a regular basis, really helps me out a lot. I also use different types of smudge—I guess it's aromatherapy stuff. Just kind of keeping that in check and just kind of having that pleasant aroma around the house are all good for balancing emotions.

Social Connection. The participants highlighted the importance of social connection for emotional well-being. While social connection has arisen in the relational theme and is inherently relational in nature, the primary intention that some participants engaged with social connection was for personal emotional well-being. Participant O shared that her emotional

wellness is rooted in doing normal things but with an intention and purpose that aligns with promoting social connection for emotional care. O demonstrated how she intentionally seeks and creates opportunities for connection; she cultivates connection so she does not feel alone and isolated. She finds connection in strangers, nature, and places and shared experiences:

> I think that being outside of my house sometimes, around people, and in nature is important for my emotional health. I crave being near people even if I'm not engaged in interactions or communicating one-to-one with everyone. I love being outside in nature, watching people do people things and watching people just engage with nature themselves or with their kids. Or I'll go sit at the dog park and just sip my coffee for two hours and just be like, "I'm here with everyone else." It's really just a connection. And it's a really private connection. I feel like I'm able to be both social and private at the same time … I have a coffee shop that I go to where I take my little laptop every couple of days. And I go, and I sit, and I do my paperwork or my invoicing. And I have my music on, and everything's great. And I've made friends, somehow, even if I'm in my little bubble. The coffee owner asks, "How's it going? What are you working on today?" We don't even know who we are. It's just one of those community things. And I'm just like, "This is nice. This is way better than sitting in my room alone trying to—" I would get the same amount of work done, but I wouldn't feel good. I would feel isolated. And especially when you work alone. Isolation is such a thing that kills Indigenous folks. I really, truly, truly believe that. Working is one thing because you have tasks to do, and there's—You have a list of things. But when you're just an individual, and you're

> isolated, it doesn't matter if you're in Downtown Vancouver or in some little town in the interior. Isolation is deadly.

Physical Activity. Physical activity emerged as a theme from the data, but this time with the specific intention to support emotional wellness. Participant T offered his experience of how he has reclaimed and maintained his emotional wellness through physical activity as an outlet for energy, space, and time for reflection. Physical activity provides a way to decompress and release accumulated emotion and physical tensions:

> For my emotional health, I walk twice a day. I wouldn't be in this business for so long if I wasn't into sports, doing the activities, because you have to have an outlet to work that stuff out. If you don't have an outlet, you're pretty well done for.

Humour. Humour emerged from the data as a strategy that participants would intentionally cultivate to support emotional well-being; it makes people feel better. Participant B shared that to support her emotional wellness, she draws from what she learned as a child, the importance of humour through the stories she shared with her. Now, she engages with stories, whether contemporary comedy, or revising her traditional stories, and she finds creative ways to invite joy from humour into her life:

> What I like to do when I unwind is to have a little bit of humour, a bit of a good belly laugh, and watch some comedy or a comedy movie. And that's good … It's those storytelling moments that really set the tone early in life for me … I don't know if you're aware of stories or legends about the animal world …. There's Raven and Mink … There are mink stories that are pretty funny. So, what comes to mind, too, for today is, like, one of the characters trying to mimic another animal, it is [comedy], but it's enlightening, too.

Spiritual Approaches. Participants shared a number of approaches that support the strengthening and maintenance of their Spirit connection, such as Indigenous cultural objects being kept within their environment, prayer, religious faiths, nature, and practices such as gratitude.

Indigenous Cultural Objects. Participants voiced the importance of Indigenous cultural objects in one's environment because they promote Spirit connection and are an act of spirituality. Participants described that being around Indigenous objects, such as sweetgrass, drums, Eagle Feathers and the like provides a Spirit connection to one's Indigeneity and Spirit. Participant O explained:

> The Medicines that I grow and smudge with all connect me to who I am as an Indigenous person. And so that's really important. The stuff I have in my office where I work every day, my Eagle Feathers, my smudge bowl, and the Medicines that I have in my office all connect me to who I am as an Indigenous person. And so that's really, really important to me and that spiritual piece of who I am. Or, again, it's the whole person. All of that stuff connects me to who I am as an Indigenous person. And it all helps with my wellness and balance. And having those kinds of things around me helps me remember who I am.

Indigenous Ceremonies. The participants shared that they have regularized engagement with Indigenous ceremonies, which inherently includes engagement with Indigenous Medicines, as a way to connect with Spirit. Participant O shared the process of engagement with Indigenous Medicines to promote Spirit. She explained that she integrates her Indigenous Medicines and ceremonies from Mexico and Canada:

> I think, when I'm feeling good, and healthy, and in my body, when I'm feeling very, very connected to myself, burning sage, burning—For us, it's a *palo santo*, which is a big one that we would burn, and cinnamon sticks. It's learning about my own Medicines from all the different places, which is still such a huge learning curve, trying to figure out how to use Medicines in a good way and not overstep. How do I collect Medicines? Where am I getting things from? Everything is mindfulness. And I think that's figuring out where I'm sourcing my Medicine and then going and getting it and bringing it home, finding a proper place for it, and cleaning the area. All of that, to me, is equally as important as sitting quietly and meditating for 10 minutes or doing the ceremony itself.

Participant B shared that she engages in cultural ceremonies when she has the opportunity to, because of the Spirit benefit she receives from them:

> In the interior here, I do attend a Sweat Lodge, which is a good thing for my Spirit. And it's not something I do all the time, but I do when I get the chance. I attend winter dances similar to—I don't know what to compare it to, but that's what I have available. Wherever I am, I find some connection to a ceremony that has the potential to be spiritually uplifting, spiritually cleansing, and healing, I suppose.

Spiritual Prayer. The importance of prayer practice as a way to connect to Spirit and nurture personal spirituality for participants. Prayer was not a formal religious practice attached to any specific faith, for many participants; rather, it was a deeply personal spiritual connection. Participant T shared that each day is rooted in prayer; any or every occasion is worthy of a prayer; "I pray every morning. Every morning, while I'm on the road before I go to work. I've

got that freedom. And that's one of the biggest things. Pray whenever you can when it comes to mind."

Participant B illustrated a similar approach to prayer that roots her in the important things in life and Spirit:

> I say prayers daily. Prayers are intention and hope. I'm not Christian. I don't belong to the Church. But for me, it's daily, just connecting in gratitude and hope and acknowledgement of where I come from. I include my Ancestors in my daily prayers. I'm thankful that they are with me and asking for that continuity for the next generations.

Religious Prayer. Some participants engage with religion and specific faith-based prayer to nurture Spirit. Participant E shared that her spirituality is grounded in daily prayer, and she invites aspects of the Catholic religion. She finds ways to reclaim and integrate Indigenous spirituality while maintaining her Catholic faith:

> I pray every morning and every night, just like my mom and my grandma used to always do. And so, I have family that were religious—Catholic religious, so, I do both, actually. Now, I do both, but my mom was more Catholic—my aunts, my grandmother, even my great-grandmother. But my great-grandmother was a Medicine Woman, so she would do both. So, I think now I'm leaning more toward half-and-half. Yeah. And that's because I am more connected with the traditional cultural people.

Nature. The participants demonstrated that Nature can be a deeply spiritual experience. Participants articulated the Spirit connection that they experience when they seek nature as a source of Spirit connection. Participant T shared that the essence of spirituality is found in nature. Nature is a place to nurture and cultivate one's spiritual connection. He created a spot in

nature where he could return regularly, with the intention to sit, be present, and saturated in nature and reconnect to Spirit:

> I think it's got my ass marks on this rock in the woods, I've sat there so much. I've been sitting there for so long. It's just kind of getting away. And, kind of, your mind just stills and becomes like nature, slow and aware of everything—You don't realize when you're out there. You don't hear anything, but you hear everything. Well, you kind of fit in there, it's just like—Well, water does that for me, too. It just kind of slows me down, and it just comes along. And you just hear water, which kind of releases something. And, to me, wilderness is where we find Spirit. We don't actually know what the wilderness is because we think it's just nature—it's a spirituality that helps us. That's who we are. And an old old-timer told me, "We're spiritual people trying to be human." Okay? And he's thinking, there. I said, "Okay. I have to learn that." And then, that's helped me move over from so much of life to kind of depend on that way of life. Because we don't realize the tree's talking, the bird's talking. As long as you're connected to—and sit there to listen.

Participant C shared that she has access to spirituality daily throughout the duration of her life to have consistent engagement with nature and elements in the natural world. She has a lodge at work where she can access fire. She has a garden where she grows Medicine. She lives close to the water to access water for spiritual connection. Her spiritual connection is found in the natural elements and plants that she engages with:

> For me, the spiritual connection that I have to nature, to the outside, to water, and spending that kind of time are all the things that I do to help me. It's important to me. In my garden, I grow, like, the four Medicines. So, I have those, and I grow them. And it's

> really an important piece for me. And the other thing for my spiritual self is to share what I know with people when they want to know that. And so, doing that, I love it because, at work, we have a lodge, and we have a fire in there every day. So, it's really nice to just kind of go in there and make an offering, and just be there with the fire, and connecting with the fire. So that's an important piece for me … In the summer, I love sitting around the fire and just like being there with the fire. So yeah, my spiritual stuff is really connected to being outside in nature and being connected to nature.

Participant B shared that she reconnects spirituality through meditating in the presence of the natural world, such as water:

> I'm really drawn to water. For me, it's getting in. I really love waterfalls. I always have. So, I'm drawn to water as a place of connection and visualization, of cleaning, and just kind of meditating in that moment and being alone with the water Spirits.

Gratitude. The practice of gratitude is a way to engage and promote Spirituality for participants. Spirituality is cultivating gratitude; it can be simply acknowledging and being aware throughout the day of things to be grateful for, having a specific gratitude practice, and noting gratitude in prayer. Participant T explained:

> When I wake every day, I just say, "Creator, thank you for giving me another day." And whatever the universe puts in front of me, the universe will help me heal with my people. That's made my life, really, is to understand the Creator, the glory, universe, your God, or whatever you want to call. But it's—Just waking up is good. I've learned gratitude.

Summary of the Wellness Role Models' Results

The wellness role models' results supported those of the wellness experts by demonstrating complimentary healing phases; 1) discontinuation of problematic substance use, 2) extraction of colonization, and 3) reclaiming cultural wellness from colonization. However, the wellness role models' data demonstrated a fourth step within the process; living guided by Spirit, which is living in the pursuit of wellness, but with Spirit. The analysis of the wellness role models' data demonstrated that Indigenous wellness is attainable within the contemporary colonial context. Once the healing is achieved, the Indigenous Spirit is reclaimed and engaged with, on an ongoing basis, as part of living in wellness.

The data demonstrated that living in wellness is consistent, conscious engagement to intentionally create one's life in order to live culturally, which is living the wellness values with reciprocal engagement, with the Spirit of kinship, relation support, contribution, and personal wellness. It is the intention with which participants actively engage in an activity and the meaning they assign to the activity that makes that action wellness-promoting and supportive of them in their pursuit of wellness. As Participant O noted; "It looks from the outside like I am living a normal life, doing normal things as anyone would do, but, in fact, I am living culturally because of the reasons I am doing them."

Chapter Six, which follows, provides a detailed discussion of the development of an Indigenous-focused model of wellness, based on the data gathered in this research from wellness experts and wellness role models. It begins with an integration of the data, culminating in an examination of an emergent model of Indigenous healing and wellness. The chapter goes on to highlight my relationship with that model, informed by the Spirit of Indigeneity.

Chapter Six: Discussion

This chapter offers a discussion of the integration of the data in an emergent model of Indigenous healing and wellness. It begins with a reflection of my own relationship with the developing model and the recognition of the significance of the Spirit of Indigeneity in my work. The chapter incorporates literature that supports and recognizes the significance of the model in upholding Indigenous wellness. Within this chapter, the implications of the findings are explored, following each phase of the model.

Personal Integration: Honouring the Spirit of Indigeneity

After sifting through the results repeatedly, I began to notice something unnameable within myself; an intuitive sense that something was missing; there was an underlying core process inherent in what the participants shared that I had not captured. There was something more than what I had communicated in my analysis. I endeavoured to take the interviews at face value, but when I analyzed the data, the words did not articulate the embodied Wisdom and essence. I realized I had captured the Spirit of their words. Many Indigenous scholars, healers, and Elders point out that Spirit is integral to healing (Duran, 2006). The significance of Spirit had begun to emerge as an integral theme in the second set of data analysis with the role models in the reclaim phase, but now, I could look back and see that Spirit was at the heart of the process. The disconnection and reconnection from Spirit were at the core of everything that was shared. Spirit was what called for someone to heal, what was repressed from colonization, what was to be reclaimed, and what guided wellness. This was the missing piece; the Spirit of Indigeneity!

The Spirit of Indigeneity

Describing Spirit and the Spirit of Indigeneity is not easy. The most significant challenge of this whole experience, for me, was being able to name what I knew was implied. The undercurrent of the Spirit of Indigeneity was woven through everything, but was not nameable in a tangible way. Like all Spirits, it is intangible and inherent within everything, so it cannot be pointed at and identified as a specific moment of behaviour. Rather, it is how the participants engaged with life and healing that was enveloped in Spirit. I noticed that it seemed to not be "cultural" to speak directly about Spirit or what Spirit is. What was important was to live spiritually, because Spirit is the guide to everything one does. Within the data, the participants consistently described behaviour that was guided by Spirit. When they were speaking about reclamation and living in wellness, they described their wellness behaviour as a reclaiming of and living in Spirit. Cultural values are an expression of Spirit. When the participants shared that they were living in a good way and living the Seven Teachings, they were describing living spiritually.

The Spirit of Indigeneity is unique. One way to understand cultural spirituality is by comparing it to traditional foods. We all need nourishment, but different cultures have different food that is unique to the land, animals, and plants. In the same way, the Spirit of Indigeneity is distinct from Spirit for other people. For example, I have heard people share that, when they first traveled to Israel or Scotland or China, they felt like they had come "home," even though they had never been there before. I suggest that they may be describing an encounter with their cultural selves.

Spirit comes to us through our relationship with our relations (i.e., the land and water and plants and animals and people), so culture can be understood to be the expression of the land and its relations—it is indivisible from our experience of Spirit. Put another way, spirituality, in the abstract, is distinct from other means of accessing/being guided by Spirit, either because it is unavailable to the human experience—that is, we are incapable of understanding Spirit due to the limitations of our humanity—or because an abstract and universal sense of Spirit is a specific experience of Spirit; for instance, for those who are seeking to experience a sense of oneness with the universe. From this perspective, we generally experience Spirit through the lens of our cultural identity, just as we look through those lenses when we consider ourselves and our life experiences. One way to make sense of this from the participants' data is to consider that they shared the importance of being on their traditional land; it is not just because it is simply familiar, it is a deep connection. The personal experience of Spirit comes to one through their relations, land, water, plants, animals, which are Indigenous to them. Based on the data and my own experience, there are a number of reasons participants did not name Spirit, including 1) the fact that internalized colonization has made culture and Spirit taboo, which certainly has been true for me; 2) participants may lack the English words to accurately describe Spirit; 3) the structure of the research questions focused on observable phenomena (i.e., specific activities); 4) the fact that, culturally, in sharing narratives, it is customary to speak indirectly, allowing for the listener—myself, in this case—to draw out the underlying message; 5) the notion that Indigenous healing—and especially wellness—is relatively new, and it requires time, space, and intentionality to process, integrate, and to make sense and meaning of experiences.

The implied pivotal idea that all the phases centered on was that colonization stole cultural Spirit from Indigenous people and replaced it with the poison of colonization, which I call *internalized colonization* and *colonial trauma*.

I now understand this state to be a colonial trance. As the participants described their lives before healing and wellness began, I noticed that they described it as if they were in a trance, asleep to the impact of colonization on their lives and blaming themselves for their misery and suffering. I thought about this question; what can put people in a trance? It dawned on me that poisons, “bad medicine”, and substances can do this! Many Indigenous people are under a colonial trance because colonization was acting like a poison.

What I witnessed was that the participants I interviewed reconnected to the Spirit of Indigeneity. This reconnection happened through a process outlined in the four phases. First, in phase one, their Spirit of Indigeneity called for healing and wellness. Then, in phase two, the development of an awareness of colonization and how it got there was required for purging the poison of colonization. This was necessary to create space for the return of, or the reclamation of, their connection to the Spirit of Indigeneity, which happened in phase three. Lastly, in phase four, the participants lived their lives in an Indigenous way because the three strands of wellness—culture, personal, and relational wellness—are bound together by the Spirit of Indigeneity. When one is connected to the Spirit of Indigeneity, everything one does is an expression of one’s Indigenous Spirit. For example, walking in the woods becomes an engagement with the land, hugging one’s grandchild is an Indigenous gesture of love, and teaching wellness to others is an Indigenous contribution.

The Spirit of Indigeneity and the Model of Cultural Healing and Wellness

I found it remarkable that, despite the different interview protocols, the wellness experts' and wellness role models' data aligned with the healing process previously put forward, leading to a life in the pursuit of wellness guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity. While the first three phases were reflected by both the wellness experts' and role models' healing process, the final phase was unique to the role models. Phase four is unique because of the questions that were distinct between the two groups. The role models' questions focused on how wellness is lived, but, before they responded to that, they would not explain how they achieved wellness without explaining how they got through the healing phases, one through three.

With this understanding of Spirit in mind, the following model of the journey of healing is offered. The visual depicts the integrated model. The model comes to life in full integrated and colourful form, to reflect the Spirit that came into the model. That is represented by the addition of colour and the new names for each phase. The symbols to represent each phase have significance and within each phase they will be unveiled, just as they were for me during this chapter.

Figure 8, below, illustrates an integrated model of healing colonial trauma and living cultural wellness, guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity. It is followed by Table 3, which outlines the integrated phases for the model of cultural healing and wellness.

Figure 8

Integrated Model of Healing Colonial Trauma and Living Cultural Wellness Guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity

Table 3

Integrated Phases for the Model of Cultural Healing and Wellness

Phase	Description
Phase 1: Spirit of Indigeneity's call to healing	The Spirit call to respond to the need for healing. It is the catalyst and turning point from living a trauma-determined life toward healing and cultural wellness
Phase 2: Purging colonial poison	Healing through the removal of internalized colonization that acts like a poison to oneself
Phase 3: Reclaiming cultural wellness	Reconnecting and recreating culture in modern life guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity
Phase 4: Living cultural wellness	Fully embracing and integrating what was reclaimed leads to a life of cultural wellness guided by one's Spirit of Indigeneity in daily life

Note. Because of the similarities between the two sets of data, an integrated model is offered. It is illustrated on the righthand column of the above table. The table illustrates the fully evolved and integrated model that will be presented in the rest of this paper. The most significant shifts were the

expanded understanding of colonial poison in phase two and the Spirit of Indigeneity at the core of the entire model.

There are three sequential and distinct phases that emerge that lead to the reclamation of the Spirit of Indigeneity within the healing process. Once reclaimed, the Spirit is with the individual to guide them and to help them move forward to live in cultural wellness. The phases that emerged with the new understanding of Spirit at the core are; 1) the call to healing, 2) purging colonial poison, 3) reclaiming cultural wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity, and 4) living cultural wellness guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity. Titles and theme names were decided based on the criteria of honesty and the need to reflect the Spirit of what the participants conveyed. In addition, titles needed to have cultural relevance, advantage, and applicability to Indigenous people. The model required a story and imagery within it that was compelling and depicted emotion that was conveyed to me within the participant's stories. Therefore, the model's titles embrace metaphors to strengthen the holistic experience of the model (i.e., physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional). Some of the titles are literal, if the above criteria were also met.

Phase One: Spirit of Indigeneity's Call to Healing

Figure 9

Visual of Sage to Represent Phase One: Spirit of Indigeneity's Call to Healing

My teaching is that Sage facilitates a spiritual calling, it is the Medicine we use to connect with Spirit and all ones' relations, in smudge and other ceremony; therefore, Sage represents phase one. The title of this chapter section, *the Spirit of Indigeneity's call to healing*, came from my understanding of the phenomenon that the participants described as they made the pivotal shift that changed the trajectory of their lives. I came to understand that the call to healing comes from one's Spirit, even through the use of problematic substances. This means that, in spite of the colonial traumas causing individuals to live a trauma-determined life, disconnected and in survival mode, their Spirit remained, and they were able experience an unnameable phenomenon that inspired them to, as they put it, wake up, or just stop using problematic substances. Participant R shared her mother's experience of disengaging with alcohol in just such an abrupt way; "My mom was like, 'That's it. No more for me, anymore.'"

In the face of colonial trauma, something remains to call the person to healing. I suggest it is the participant's Spirit that is still there, fighting for their healing and guiding them in healing and wellness. This Spirit was never gone, but they were not able to connect to it, and, as a result, they felt sick and depressed. The separation from Spirit was created by colonial trauma, and the attempt of the people to soothe the suffering that colonial trauma created was then compounded by the use of substances and other means of problematic coping, which furthered the disconnection.

In spite of colonial trauma and the suppression of Spirit through the use of colonial substances, the Spirit has the strength and force to awaken them from a trauma-determined life of survival and coping, and calls the individual into healing and onto the path of wellness. The data analysis revealed that all participants received a call to healing, but there are two distinct

responses, depending on whether one is actively engaged with problematic substances or not. The first is a personal call to healing that requires disengagement from problematic substances, such as alcohol. To those gifted with sobriety by prior generations, an answered call to healing is still required to address colonial trauma. Both paths serve as an initiation into healing.

The call to healing from the Spirit of Indigeneity is an awakening from a colonial trance, and a move away from a trauma-determined life towards a Spirit-led life. Answering one's call to wellness requires breaking the cycle of trauma response. This means disengaging with negative patterns that cause harm to oneself and one's relations. Some participants inherited sobriety from generations who had previously broken the cycle of problematic substance use, whereas other participants were the ones who had to break the cycle of substance use themselves.

Phase Two: Purging Colonial Poison

Figure 10

Visual of Buckthorn to Represent Phase Two: Purging Colonial Poison

Phase two is represented by Buckthorn. I have been taught that Buckthorn is an invasive plant that will colonize an area but also, if ingested, will cause purging and laxative effects. Up to this point, phase two was named *extracting colonization*. However, it was not until carefully

sifting through synonyms and metaphors from the entirety of the data arising from what I had previously called *extracting colonization* that I could potentially describe what I understood. For example, Participant J stated:

> I have experienced so-called "culture" being used as a way of discriminating against women and keeping women sort of in their place, like Western society, and I don't think that's right. That is the colonized culture, and is not cultural, and reinforces the Western values. I had to reject that aspect of so-called "culture."

As mentioned, the second phase was originally called *extracting colonization*. However, the word "extracting" did not capture the significance and intensity of the participants' efforts to remove the negative toxic power of colonization within their lives. Extraction does not imply that what is being extracted was not supposed to be there, nor does it imply that what is being extracted was forcibly placed there to cause harm. It became clear that I needed to abandon the word "extract" and embrace a stronger, more accurate metaphor. When I stepped back and looked at the relationship between phase one, the Spirit calling, and phase two, I was reminded that, prior to one's Spirit calling, they were living in a colonial trance.

From an Indigenous perspective, what I have come to learn through cultural teachings is the teaching of "bad medicine." People can come under a trance from bad medicine, which is poison. Colonization can be understood as a poison, and one way to get rid of poisons is to purge them. Therefore, colonization is a poison that requires purging. I deeply considered the metaphor. *Purging colonial poison* is a more accurate descriptor because poison is something that makes one sick, and colonization made people spiritually disconnected and mentally, emotionally, and physically ill. Second, compounding the immense suffering resulting from the

poison of colonization was the ironic solution to ease the suffering of colonization through the use of colonial substances (e.g., alcohol and other drugs) which are a literal poison. Akin to the proverbial adding salt to the wound, the participants acknowledged that they (in some cases) and their families (in all cases) turned to colonial poisons of substances and alcohol to try to cope with the poison of colonization itself. The colonial poison had to be purged holistically; the participants described a messy and chaotic untangling of colonization from one's heart, mind, body, and Spirit.

The participants' description of purging colonization, including internalized colonization that hurt them relationally and personally, offered specific contemporary themes. The participants purged colonized culture, internalized colonization, and colonized relations. The following diagram summarizes these three domains requiring purging with specific themes, where relevant.

Table 4

Summary of Phase Two: Purging Colonization

Domain	Themes
Purging colonized culture	Colonized Indigenous culture Colonial values Colonized Indigenous language Colonial religion Colonial boundaries Colonial Indigenous essentialism
Purging internalized colonization	Colonial shame Conditioned helplessness Colonial coping Colonized masculinity
Purging harmful colonized relations	

Phase Three: Reclaiming Cultural Wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity

Figure 11

Visual of Fireweed to Represent Phase Three: Reclaiming Cultural Wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity

Phase three is represented by Fireweed. I have witnessed Fireweed as a reclaiming plant. In my Nation, it grows all over right now, because it propagates itself and reclaims places that have been traumatized and disturbed, such as areas affected by the recent forest fire that swept through the territory. Fireweed comes and breathes life back into the black, burnt forest, and the contrast of the vibrant green and purple against a coal-black backdrop is breathtaking.

Phase three demonstrated the reclamation of culture and Spirit. I came to understand *reclaiming* as the phase of Indigenous reconnection with Spirit and one's Indigeneity—realizing that the essence of what makes one Indigenous was poisoned by colonization. This research demonstrates that healing is reclaiming the essence and Spirit of Indigeneity in the contemporary colonial context. Reclaiming Indigeneity is reclaiming the Spirit inherent to Indigenous experience, including ideas, values, perspectives, philosophies, protocols, traditions, and culture.

This Spirit supported Indigenous wellness prior to colonization and continues to do so today, for those who have purged the poison of colonization and are engaged in healing.

I have heard that Indigenous people thrived for millennia prior to colonization because they were spiritual people connected to their relations and to themselves. Therefore, if Spirit supported Indigenous people to thrive, then I understand that the Spirit of Indigeneity will always support healing and wellness, unless one cannot access it—in this case, because of the colonial poisoning of Spirit. In phase two, necessary aspects of harmful colonialism were purged; now, the reclamation of cultural wellness and one's Spirit of Indigeneity can be reclaimed in this healing phase. Table 5, below, provides an overview of the domains and the specific themes of integrated reclamation rooted in Spirit that were described by both wellness experts and role models.

Table 5

Summary of Phase Three: Reclaim Cultural Wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity

Domain	Themes
Reclaiming culture	Calls for Indigenous people to: Reclaim culture's living process Reclaim cultural values Reclaim stories of resilience Reclaim truths about colonialism Reclaim the grief for the losses of colonization Reclaim colonial institutions

Reclaiming the Spirit of relational wellness	Calls for Indigenous people to: Reclaim the Spirit of Indigenous names Reclaim the Spirit of family tradition Reclaim the Spirit of collective empowerment Reclaim the Spirit of wellness-promoting relations Reclaim the Spirit of Elders Reclaim the Spirit of matriarchs Reclaim the Spirit of community Reclaim the Spirit of family Reclaim the Spirit of Indigenous role models Reclaim the Spirit of connection to Indigenous lands
Reclaiming the Spirit of personal wellness	Calls for Indigenous people to: Reclaim the Spirit of identity Reclaim the Spirit of healing Reclaim the Spirit of emotional wellness Reclaim peace Reclaim vulnerability Reclaim mental wellness Hold a non-judgement perspective Maintain a positive perspective Have an open-minded perspective Reclaim the Spirit of spiritual wellness Reclaim the Spirit of Indigenous Medicine

Phase Four: Living Cultural Wellness Guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity

The fourth phase, living cultural wellness guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity, is shown below, in Figure 12, in an illustration of cedar.

Figure 12

Visual of Cedar to Represent Phase Four: Living Cultural Wellness Guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity

Cedar is depicted to represent living cultural wellness rooted, quite literally, in Spirit. Cedar can symbolize the "tree of life." I have often heard that healing requires Spirit and is a spiritual process. This is understood as part of the spirituality quadrant on the Medicine Wheel and is conflated with engaging with Spiritual ceremonies and being connected to the Creator. While that has truth, what became obvious to me throughout this research was the difference between spirituality (i.e., with Spirit as a creator, or as an independent being, like a god) as a practice, and Spirit (i.e., not a creator, and not a practice). I noticed that there is a difference between 1) spiritual practices, 2) understanding spirituality in relation to the Creator, and 3) Spirit. While this research will talk about spirituality, as mentioned, what I am referring to is a third understanding of Spirit that emerged within the healing process described by the participants. This refers to Spirit with a capital S. Spirit is not reduced to a divine being, nor only available in a particular Medicine, practice, or ritual. Spirit is infused in and steeped in all actions in which one engages.

Through careful listening to the participants, and considering my own experience, I have come to understand that living cultural wellness guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity is *the Spirit*, the intention with which one engages with an action, the Spirit, and belief in something, and the Spirit within oneself must be present or reclaimed, which was accomplished, for the participants, in phase three.

However, without the purging of colonization (which takes place in phase two), reclamation cannot happen. I had personally experienced a *stuckness* when I tried to find different spiritual practices to "fix" me. But I had not yet purged colonial poison, and I sought spiritual practices as a medicine antidote, however, without my reconnection to Spirit, they could not work; I had not yet engaged in the first two phases.

Participants demonstrated how they continue to live cultural wellness with the Spirit of Indigeneity guiding them in all life engagements. The participants demonstrated how they engage with the domains of their culture, their relations, and themselves in an Indigenous way in contemporary life to thrive as an Indigenous person in cultural wellness, rooted in their Spirit.

Table 6

Summary of Phase Four: Cultural Wellness Guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity

Domain	Themes
Culture	Living guided by the Spirit of Elders The Spirit of Living in a good way Living the Spirit of wellness values

Relational wellness	The Spirit of Indigenous connection The Spirit of kinship Offering the Spirit of support to others Contribution to other Indigenous people's healing and wellness
Personal wellness	Maintaining balance in activities of daily living: Physically Mentally Emotionally Spiritually

Summary of Personal Integration of the Results and the Model

With the context set and the model presented, with my personal contributions and understanding of the data, I move into a deeper discussion of the results that weaves in literature and investigates each of the phases and themes.

Further Exploration of the Model with Complementary Literature

Sto:lo / Squamish author, activist, theoretician, and orator Lee Maracle (1990) wrote with courageous authenticity and is an inspiration for situating my position within the discussion. Vranckx (2008) summarized Maracle's position in a way that resonated true to the core of what I also strive for:

> Lee Maracle strongly opposes these colonial constructs and the resulting erasure of Native voices in the mainstream. She cares very little about preserving her readership's mental comfort or acquiring a fake popularity by playing the part of the 'white man's

> Indian' … On the contrary, she is part of the growing number of Aboriginal authors who expose Canada's colonial foundations (p. 2).

I set out on this research to untangle my own dilemma, which I felt might be shared amongst other Indigenous people and certainly within the circle of Indigenous people I know. I started out this dissertation by articulating a contemporary colonial issue that some Indigenous people may face, saying that:

> One may feel torn between two dichotomous worlds, with pressure to mold oneself and submit to just one; however, regardless of choice, you still feel like a fraud and imposter, not feeling you fit anywhere, not Native, but not White. Who am I? How can I be well? These are questions I've confronted much of my life, and many people share; a disoriented experience of themselves and life resulting in dis-ease.

I wanted to demonstrate Indigenous individuals' resilience and document the reclamation and revitalization of themselves and their lives in a contemporary colonial context, something I had been striving to do my entire life. Who else was doing this? How? I wanted to hear the narratives of Indigenous people thriving in a contemporary context.

I was tired of hearing about colonization, healing, and decolonization. I thought, "When can we, as a people, just get to live and thrive, already?" What I learned was that being born into wellness—taking into account historical colonization and this contemporary colonial context—is not a privilege granted to Indigenous people. Personal and collective decolonization requires healing; decolonization is healing. Decolonization, which is purging internalized colonization, is required for wellness. Decolonization is necessary to allow for the reclaims necessary for us to become reconnected to what makes us Indigenous. That was not necessarily what I wanted to

learn. Learning that wellness is not a privilege, without healing, as well as hearing and learning about the unavoidable struggles to get to wellness—something I thought I should be an inherent right at birth—was a tough pill to swallow.

I set out, at the beginning of this research, to offer narratives that broke the stereotypes often offered to Indigenous people. I aimed to have Indigenous people who are contemporary experts in Indigenous wellness illustrate wellness within a contemporary colonial context, followed by Indigenous wellness role models who showed how it is lived. Both groups of participants did just that; they illuminated the path forward of how to thrive as a proud, self-determined Indigenous person within the colonial context. In that regard, this research was successful.

I am inspired and proud, and I have immense respect and love for each of the participants who brought this to life and shed new insight into culture and Indigenous wellness, and what these look like in today's world. As Participant O perfectly summarized; "It looks from the outside like I am living a normal life, doing normal things as anyone would do, but, in fact, I am living culturally because of the reasons I am doing them."

The purpose of this research was threefold; first, to conceptualize and iteratively co-create an understanding of contemporary Indigenous wellness within the current socio-cultural context from the perspective of wise Indigenous people. Here, the goal was to conceptualize a contemporary understanding of Indigenous wellness; this did happen, but not as I originally intended. The intention was to have the wellness experts create the conceptualization and definition and to iteratively go back and forth with them to get to a final shared understanding. However, the wellness experts provided me with data that could be organized into a

contemporary Indigenous healing process; therefore, there was no back-and-forth to engage in, regarding the concept of wellness. The wellness experts offered me something that I did not ask for; I look back now and realize, and am in awe of, their resistance to some of my questions and their integrity to say what needed to be said. What they offered was much more rich, meaningful, and valuable for Indigenous people. They opened my eyes to the necessity for healing when every cell in my body wanted to deny that truth. They opened my eyes to decolonization, shaped how I came to see decolonization as purging colonial poison, and also illustrated that decolonization creates a void within oneself to be filled with the beautiful and wonderful gifts of cultural wellness and Spirit.

The second objective was to honour and share successful examples of where wellness is achieved in contemporary life, and I do not believe that could have been illustrated by the wellness role models more perfectly. The wellness role models went into great detail, with courageous honesty about their lives as they strive for wellness as Indigenous people.

The third objective was to support the wellness of the individuals participating. I did not do an assessment to measure the impact of the relationship; however, participants did share the following themes in their reflection about their participation in this research; 1) It was an important and focused reflection on Indigenous wellness that they had not had the time and space to engage in previously, which gave me the sense that it was meaningful, 2) Their participation was a gift for them; first, in that they were asked to participate, which they perceived as an honour, and, second, that their participation was an opportunity to exercise their Indigeneity and wellness. It was an Indigenous wellness contribution to healing and wellness that is fundamental

to Indigenous wellness. And their engagement in the interviews was an act of Indigenous healing and wellness contribution in itself.

I set out to contribute new knowledge on contemporary Indigenous wellness and how it is being lived by Indigenous individuals, and that has been done. I said I wanted this research to illuminate the narratives of Indigenous people who have reclaimed their Indigeneity and now thrive in wellness in a contemporary context. Finally, I set out, in this research context, to name the current, overarching, dominant, systemic, Western, Canadian culture and its corresponding paradigms, epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies. And that is complete.

Based on interviews with seven wellness experts and seven wellness role models, this chapter initiated dialogue on these questions. In brief, the most significant finding was that Indigenous healing and wellness are about revitalizing and reclaiming the Indigenous Spirit. The results of the data analysis point to five main themes:

1) Both wellness experts and role models data reported here reflected a healing process required to move toward Indigenous wellness, which is the outcome of healing

2) Personal healing is the process of reclaiming cultural wellness and the Indigenous Spirit

3) Healing and wellness can be achieved in this inherently harmful colonial context if one engages in an ongoing healing process

4) To reclaim Indigenous Spirit requires decolonization, or what this model refers to as *purging colonization*

5) The essential reclamations of one's Indigeneity and Spirit are transformative and, once these are reclaimed, one can live guided by, and continuously engaged in, cultural wellness and Spirit

Existing literature also aligns with the phases and Spirit of this model and accounts for the current colonial oppressive context. First, Vranckx (2008) observes that healing is reconnecting to one sacredness; if one were to ask, "What is it that is sacred within us?" the path goes to Spirit. Spirit is what makes us sacred beings. In regard to an Indigenous woman's healing, Vranckx (2008) asserts:

> Her fundamental problem can be understood as her being out of touch with her own sacredness or holistic self. According to Anderson, "[a] key place to begin reconstructing self is with the understanding that we are all sacred beings" (194). Counsellors Alannah Young (Cree / Anishnaabe) and Denise Nadeau express this through the notion of "sacred vitality," the feeling of energetic connection with one's own sacredness, with the earth and with others in community, a feeling of being fully alive. This aliveness allows one to "stand one's ground" in experiencing one's rootedness in a web of relations. Sacred vitality supports transformation, affirms collective strength and sacredness in the face of oppression, and creates new forms of power and non-violent embodied ways of being in this world (p. 66).

This chapter will further explore the findings by presenting the merged data from both the experts and role models in phases one through three; the fourth phase is distinct to the role models' data as they explored living in wellness in more detail as a result of the variance in the interview protocol. Each of the phases and themes integrates relevant literature with pragmatic

implications. It is important to note that, within phases two and three, depth and detail of explicit themes are presented. The results honour the participants' voices by looking to existing research that may support their unique example. Each story is inspiring, and it is important to demonstrate the diversity in life contexts and the unique, creative, and ingenious ways the participants moved through the healing process to reclaim wellness and lived it.

Colonization: A Poison

> In Native philosophies, everything consists of energy and is imbued with Spirit.
>
> Rahm (2014), *Deconstructing the Western worldview: Toward the repatriation and Indigenization of wellness.*

What if colonization, at its core, is about poisoning the Indigenous Spirit, and all the strategies employed were compounded poisons to the Indigenous Spirit? This is what I have come to believe from this research. Colonization has acted like a poison to cultural wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity. I have come to understand that living in cultural wellness is living guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity. Spirit is two things; 1) Spirit as intention, which describes the Spirit that one engages in healing and wellness promoting action, and 2) the Spirit of Indigeneity, both of which are reclaimed in phase three. However, without the purging of colonial poison, which happens in phase two, reclamation cannot happen. This became clear from the data. For example, Participant J's narrative demonstrated the process eloquently:

> As I said, I came to the wellness field through my own healing. It was through my own healing and education that I learned about colonization and what really happened; it is not talked about at all by anyone. As I learned, I realized how awful and untrue it was; I had to unlearn it, in a way, and then begin relearning our Indigenous [way].

In Canada, the primary intention of the residential school wave of colonization was to "remove the Indian from the child" (Government of Canada, 1876). A well-known and commonly accepted Indigenous belief is that children are closest to the Spirit world and have the strongest Spirits. It is not a coincidence that one of the most perverse colonial strategies was to attack the children to poison their Spirit and replace it with religion, shame, and trauma, which was done using violent strategies (Cardinal, 1969). Following this logic, it could be argued that still, today, the child welfare system acts as a colonial poison, as it persists, and more Indigenous children are in care today than ever attended residential school. The child welfare system is a continuation of, and in part, is the same colonial strategy as residential schools and the Sixties Scoop (Blackstock, 2007). Blackstock (2007) notes that, "In fact, there are more First Nations children in child welfare care today than at the height of residential schools by a factor of three" (p. 74).

To poison the Indigenous Spirit, violent religious and White supremacist colonial strategies were enacted (Cardinal, 1969). Indigenous people were thought to be evil and satanic, so it makes sense that one of the colonial strategies, the residential school system, was created to address the underlying "evil" Indigenous Spirit, and all efforts were made to remove the Indigenous Spirit from the children, their families, and Nations (Cardinal, 1969). The good in all the historical and ongoing colonial violence is that the Indigenous Spirit remains. The efforts to kill the Indigenous people and their Spirit have not worked. Duran et al. (1998) ascertain a similar understanding; Indigenous people suffered a soul wound, which means that, although the Spirit is intact, it is wounded and requires healing. Brave Heart and De Bruyn (n.d.) state:

> Native people who were asked about problems in the contemporary Native community explained that present problems had their etiology in the traumatic events known as the "soul wound." Knowledge of the soul wound has been present in Indian country for many generations. Current synonymous terms include historical trauma, historical legacy, American Indian holocaust, and intergenerational posttraumatic stress (p. 341).

Indigenous people's Spirits are still alive—although suppressed and sick from the colonial poison—and are waiting to be illuminated to guide their lives once again. The colonial poison must be cleansed; then, the Spirit can be reclaimed and guide each person to wellness.

Spirit is in everything and in all one's relations; culture, families, language, the land, oneself. Trauma is a separation or disconnection from one's Spirit in all aspects; self, mental, emotional, physical, and all one's relations (Duran, 2019; Maté, 2011, Simington, 2013). As Simington (2013) notes:

> Traumatic events of the past decades have touched each of us in either primary or secondary ways. The effects of trauma are experienced physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and spiritually … Trauma has been referred to as spiritual disconnection. It is well recognized that crises, such as those experienced during and following trauma, can drive a traumatized person inward, there to experience the "dark night of the soul" (p. 2).

Therefore, the colonial poison forced upon Indigenous people was spiritual and holistic, comprising mind, body, family, culture, nation, land, and all relational traumas (Thira, 2009). Spirit is the common thread that connects Indigenous people to all their relations and selves; spiritual trauma is the core trauma (Duran, 2019). Spirit connects one to one's culture, to the land, and to one's language. Colonial poison caused a deep separation from individuals and all

their relations. One cannot connect to oneself without Spirit; one cannot connect to all one's relations without Spirit; one cannot connect to culture without Spirit. Cleansing colonial poison is trauma-healing by removing the poison and reconnecting one to one's Spirit and relations.

This research suggests that colonial poisoning results in spiritual damage; therefore, healing must be at a spiritual level. A contemporary cleansing ceremony can purge the colonial poison, where Spirit, self, Indigeneity, and all one's relations are reclaimed. The antidote to colonial poison is the reclamation of the Indigenous Spirit. The participants' data has suggested that this can occur through a contemporary Indigenous healing process.

Indigenous Healing Models in Contemporary Colonial Context

There is one model that was not in the existing literature of this research that was found to align with some of the findings in this research. The model offered by Anderson (2010) does not have an official title, but it offers four phases of healing and situates healing within the context of modern life to reclaim Native womanhood. *Native womanhood* could have relevance to, and include the capacity to reclaim self. From this research, it is understood that the reclamation of oneself and Spirit is Indigenous wellness. In Anderson's (2010) healing process, there are striking similarities to my own work, reflected in the four phases of both models. According to Anderson (2010), phase one is *resisting negative definitions of Native womanhood*, which "is, at the same time, resistance to colonization itself" (p. 115). This model embraces the perspective that healing is resistance to colonization and rejection of colonial projections of Indigenous people; the model offered by my research also embraces resistance to colonization, so much so that I suggest that colonization must be purged. This moves beyond Anderson's (2010) "negative definitions of Native womanhood," to colonially defined Indigenous

personhood, accomplished by purging colonial shame, identity, culture, and the like, with extensive examples of the colonization that have been internalized and the colonial impacts that must be purged.

Anderson's (2010) second phase is *reclaiming one's traditions and origins* (157). Her third phase involves "reconstructing Native womanhood … making sense of how ancestral traditions can fit into our modern lives" (Anderson, 2010, p. 193). Phases two and three of Anderson's (2010) work aligns with the *reclaiming cultural wellness from colonization* phase of this research's model. Anderson's (2010) model addresses the work of reclamation—braiding in culture and values and bringing them to life in modern life, whereas, in this research, the *reclaiming* phase makes explicit the role of cultural wellness and Spirit. Anderson (2010) states that there is a reclamation of "traditions and origins" (p. 157) and reconstruction of Aboriginal womanhood; a notion which applies in both models, the weaving of traditions back into the contemporary world. But what is illuminated in this research's model is that the reconstruction of one's Indigeneity is also the reclamation of Indigenous Spirit and cultural wellness, as demonstrated in the comprehensive data in phase three and four of this model. As Participant J stated:

> I had internalized a lot of the racism and oppression that I experienced from society and the world at large, that we are not intelligent, less than in every way, addicts, lazy, uneducated; if we are successful, it is also used against us—We somehow got by, but not because of our intellect. I also have my own Indigenous community as well because I am of mixed blood. Right? So, sometimes, a person isn't Indian enough. And so, through the process of my own healing and getting better and better, I had to get rid of that negative

belief of myself and am able to come to a place where I could absolutely feel like I owned that identity; I think that was huge for me.

So, culture isn't necessarily a source—Culture and cultural practice can be a source of wellness or harm … It's the underlying values and Indigenous values that are different than the Western that will determine if it is wellness-promoting; [if] it is Indigenous or if does not promote wellness, it's probably colonized culture—So, it's the values underlying that determine wellness … So, there's that, which I'm discerning about which cultural practices I want to have in my life, right, and which ones that I don't espouse if they are colonized.

Culture is an expression of underlying values. And so, when you're seeing this incongruence, you're like, "This isn't Indigenous. This isn't wellness-promoting, because it's not aligning with the Indigenous culture, which is our values."

So, one of my things here was being able to see culture as dynamic so that I'm not being caught into something and fluid, so that I can discern, right? "Does this fit for me, or is this something that I wouldn't practice?" Some practices that I see or have experienced seem very patriarchal, for example, and I don't think that they contribute to women's overall … sense of agency. Right? So, you're constantly looking at as culture evolves and changes or even how it was interpreted or understood or remembered from the past; it may or may not be accurate, but you have your own internal compass of values that guides what you're embracing as culture as you're weaving your culture back together.

> For example, the value of equality and feminism are definitely those. And I know that we talk about—and there are—matriarchal societies, but I know that there's also been colonization, which has disrupted that in many places. So, I think that sometimes culture can be used. Okay. This is going out on a limb. I have experienced so-called "culture" being used as a way of discriminating against women and keeping women sort of in their place, like Western society, and I don't think that's right. That is the colonized culture, and [it] is not cultural, and reinforces the Western values.

The fourth phase of Anderson's (2010) work is *acting based on knowing one's responsibilities*. This last phase is similarly captured within my research's fourth phase as a major theme, *the Spirit of contribution*. While phase four of this research is more holistic, including personal, relational, and cultural wellness rooted in Spirit, this model also acknowledges a core strand of Indigenous healing and wellness, which is finding one's source for Indigenous healing and wellness contribution. As Participant T shared:

> I worked for the people and their healing and wellness all my life, pretty much. No one else. I've never worked for a person. Even my boss, I haven't worked for. I've worked for the betterment of the people. And that's my motto. That's the way, and I am sticking with it. It has never got me in trouble, so, hey, it keeps me well, too.

Summary

This research suggests that Indigenous healing and wellness are to be achieved through four sequential phases, leading to the reclamation of cultural wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity that was poisoned by colonization. The four-phase healing model is distinct in

process, with contemporary examples illustrated in the subsequent sections, providing an in-depth discussion of each phase and the supporting literature.

Discussion Phase 1: Spirit of Indigeneity Call to Healing

Western models of healing focus on an individual's desire for change and readiness, which gives the illusion it is simply the person's will to change that will determine someone's ability to change and initiate healing. For example, the Western, evidence-based approach of motivational interviewing ascertains that the approach by which practitioners ask the questions will motivate individuals to move toward healing. Noonan and Moyers (1997) point out that:

> Motivational interviewing (MI) is a directive client-centered counselling style that is designed to assist clients in exploring and resolving ambivalence to increase motivation for change … From a transtheoretical perspective, MI assists client movement through the stages of change to the 'action' stage where engaging in change behaviours begins (p. 8).

This model challenges the colonial perspective of personal will and de-centers the common perception that this type of trauma healing, such as substance dependence, will come predominantly from an outside source, such as a therapist. This research also challenges the Western idea that "addiction" is a choice. As Sen (2023) states, "Many believe that addiction is a conscious choice and that everyone who is hooked on a substance is there due to a lack of self-discipline or morals" (p. 412). The idea of choice is infused throughout Western medicine; for example, on medical assessments and treatment referral forms, such as Heartwood Treatment Center for Women in BC, the referral lists substances and asks the individual to select their top three choices of substances (BC Mental Health and Substance Use Services, n.d.).

Instead, this research aligns with the ideas of Gabor Maté (2008), who posits that individuals who suffer from the wounds of colonial trauma and are living trauma-determined lives are not making a mere choice. Maté (2012) is well known for asking, "not 'why the addiction?', but 'why the pain?'" (p. 10). As Maté (2012) attests, "rather than choice, chance or genetic predetermination, it is childhood adversity … Childhood emotional loss and trauma, then, provide both the experiential, psycho-emotional and physiological template for addiction that creates the susceptibility for addiction" (p. 61). This research suggests that not only is it not the person's choice to engage in substance dependence, it is a predictable and natural outcome of the trauma of colonization, and also, it is something much more significant that inspires individuals to step into healing; " a spiritual emptiness" (Maté, 2008, p. 25). In essence, it is the Spirit's call.

The emergent model arising from this research is initiated with the first step—the Spirit of Indigeneity call to healing. Most of the participants expressed their belief that there was an unnamed source that inspired them to begin healing despite, or potentially in response to, their suffering and coping with "addiction." The Spirit in which this phase was shared demonstrated how momentous it was for them and their family. It seemed to be inspired by something much larger than the individual—such as a subtle "calling;" but by whom or what? No participant named a "Spirit calling," however, as mentioned previously, I have come to a conclusion, through careful embodied listening to the participants' narratives, that it was something larger than one's self-calling for healing. This is similar to the position of Martha Beck, a Harvard social scientist, regarding Western culture disconnecting humans from their innate nature, which could also be understood as intrinsic Spirit. Beck (2021, as cited in Forleo, 2022) observes that:

> The single sign we have lost ourselves is suffering … When [Western] culture takes away our nature, the more we suffer, and the world feels toxic and horrible, and we do not feel like we have a sense of purpose, and our relationships don't go well, and we often get addicted to things. At a certain point, it gets so bad that suffering won't let us continue to abandon our true self. And that is [Spirit's] gift; it is always a friend and always an ally.

Spirit callings have been documented in diverse contexts. Within the Buddhist tradition, a "Spirit-calling" is a healing practice used by Vietnamese people (Nguyen, 2014, p. 40). Calling one's Spirit back is also documented in Native American healing. Isaacson et al. (2022) note that individuals affected by cancer had a "desire to reconnect with their traditional spirituality while on the cancer journey, feeling that calling the Spirit back may ease the distress associated with cancer" (p. 271). Spirit callings have also been documented as an explanation for some individuals being called to become Spiritual people, such as a traditional Healer (Sefotho, 2016) or a shaman (Basilov, 2016).

This research indicates that all Indigenous people are impacted by colonial trauma and, therefore, require some level of healing. The literature is indicative of the Spirit of Indigeneity calling for healing (Isaacson et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2014). This research supports the notion that Indigenous people and culture are woven with Spirit. Similarly, the existing literature lends credence to the idea of a Spirit calling leading a person to become an actively spiritual person (Basilov, 2016; Sefotho, 2016).

Spirit and spirituality are woven into every discourse about Indigenous people, their culture, worldview, and healing models. It is hard to find anything about Indigenous people where Spirit is not mentioned. As Isaacson et al. (2022) explain, in regard to their research with

Indigenous people and their finding that Indigenous health and wellness is braided with Spirit, "Spirituality does not exist in isolation, rather it infuses every dimension of life, and is integral to well-being and health" (p. 269). The literature within this understanding supports the concept of an Indigenous Spirit calling for Indigenous people to become the spiritual people that they inherently are, and it is not a stretch to say that what one's Spirit calls for is for one to become who they were intended to be, living in wellness, guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity.

The idea that one has an innate unique Spirit that is always with oneself, and that this Spirit is a source of self and wellness that becomes obscured by trauma, is an idea that is shared amongst Indigenous perspectives (Vranckx, 2008), science (Brach, 2019; Maté, 2011), and spiritual Wisdoms, such as Buddhism (Brach, 2019). This perspective is found in trauma healing models and literature—the concept that healing is becoming who one would have been, had they not experienced traumas (Brach, 2019; Maté, 2015; Vranckx, 2008).

Vranckx's (2008) work illustrates the fact that the Indigenous perspective of one's true self is covered over because of trauma's painful experiences, and that healing is spiritual:

> Each person on the earth "has a purpose or a reason for being;" however, hardships can disconnect them from it; when we were born, we knew the reason for why we came. But, for many of us, remembering is difficult because our true selves are covered over by the memories and feelings associated with the painful experiences in our lives. The spiritual task before us requires us to work our way back through all of those experiences to uncover our true selves by remembering who we are and what our gifts are … Uncovering this fundamental self is an act of recognition, a physical, spiritual, and emotional remembering (p. 64).

In her work on the premise of healing to unveil one's true self, psychologist and spiritual teacher, Tara Brach (2023), observes:

> For decades, prayer has circulated in the background of my daily life. May I trust my own goodness. May I see the goodness in others. This longing emerged from a deep place of suffering I went through as a young adult. During that dark time, I felt anxious and depressed, separate from the world around me. I was continually judging myself as falling short, not good enough, doubting my basic worth … It feels like grace that this "trance of unworthiness" led me onto a spiritual path and showed me how to hold myself with compassion. This allowed me to see through the layers of judgement and doubt and discover clarity, openness, presence, and love beneath them. Increasingly, over the years, my trust in this loving awareness as the essence of who we are … No matter how long or lacking we may feel, how caught in separation, how trapped by the messages, violations, and inequities of the society we live in, this basic essence remains the essence of our being … We cover our own innate purity [self] and goodness as we encounter a challenging world. As children, many of us were criticized, ignored, misunderstood, or abused, leading us to doubt the gold within us. As we grow up, we increasingly internalize the judgements and values of our society, further losing touch with our innocence, creativity, and tender hearts. We cover over the gold [of true self and Spirit] … And, if we are not part of the non-dominant group in our culture, we take on additional layers of protection to help us face the violence of social injustice and oppression (p. 2).

Others align with this perspective, which understands that each person has a unique, innate personhood that becomes obscured by trauma and, in the case of this research, prolific colonial trauma. Consequently, healing is responding to the call to one's innate experience, self, and body (Brach, 2019; Levine, 1997; van der Kolk, 2014). Maté (2011) exemplifies the ideology of an innate self-obscured by trauma:

> And I would like to consider, even before we speak about addictions, the meaning of recovery. We talk about recovery, and in addiction, recovery is, of course, the goal. Well, what does it mean to recover? To recover something is to find it. That is what the word means. Which is to say, that recovery means finding something that must have been there all along because if it wasn't, you couldn't find it. And that something that recovery aims to find is nothing less than oneself (p. 3).

Potentially, in this case, it could be understood as the Spirit of Indigeneity calling one to one's purpose or, as the psychologist Carl Jung (1961) named it, the innate drive of self-actualization and healing. It is evident that colonization could not kill or remove the Spirit of Indigeneity, even with extreme colonial strategies, such as the introduction of harmful substances; compounded with other traumatizing colonial strategies, life was unbearable for many Indigenous people. In response, to maintain one's survival, one had no choice but to engage with problematic, harmful substances—poison—that depressed and numbed one's experience, including their Spirit, and created a spiritual void (Brave Heart, 2003; Maté, 2008; Peele, 1987).

This research demonstrates that problematic substances, like alcohol, depress and numb Spirit, making one unable to hear their Spirit calling. Previous research supports this idea. Duran

(2006) ascertains that alcohol takes over one's Spirit, leading to a profound disconnection from oneself, community, and culture. This spiritual disconnection maintains cycles of trauma and substance use (Duran, 2006; Duran, 2018). Other research attributed alcohol as a colonial tool to deliberately cause harm and compromise Indigenous people, their families, and their Nation structures, to advance colonization (Daschuk, 2013; Mancall, 1995). To understand the role of alcohol and Indigenous Spirit, some historical context is needed:

> Very few North American Native cultures had had experience with alcohol before the first wave of European colonization … Alcohol was introduced to North American Indian tribal communities by white explorers and traders. Jacques Cartier, a French explorer, and Henry Hudson documented the first instances of alcohol being used as a trading commodity in the late 1500s. Both men wrote that initially Indians were distrustful of the effects of alcohol but soon learned to enjoy their interaction with traders. Although alcohol was commonly used by explorers and traders as a means to establish friendship with Native peoples … In 1778, for example, Captain Cook reported that "when offered virtuous liquors, they rejected them as something unnatural and disgusting to the palate" (Duran, 2018, p. 115).

This is the first place where alcohol is described as "spiritous," eliciting the idea that alcohol has a relationship and impact on Spirit. Duran (2018) goes on to describe the fact that, despite "Natives" not liking alcohol, offering it was a strategy employed for colonization and genocide; "Native drinking, despite all statements to the contrary, was encouraged in order to increase trade profit, induce concessions, and sap the strength of the tribes. Alcohol was thus an important element in the inevitable disappearance of the Indian" (p. 117).

An Indigenous prophet, in the late 1700s, recognized the horrific impact of alcohol and the use of alcohol for ultimate genocide and was one of the first to advocate against alcohol and make the connection to colonial poison and Spirit (Duran, 2018). Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee prophet, saw his fellow people as "unrepentant drunkards that were forced to swallow molten lead until flames shot from their mouths and nostrils" (p. 123). This description elicits a disturbing reaction; the alcohol possesses them with demonic imagery. He calls alcohol a poison or curse and calls for ceremony as the antidote. Through this study, I have come to understand that ceremony is engaged to connect with Spirit. Tenskwatawa recognized that alcohol disconnected Spirit, and that ceremony would reconnect one to the Indigenous Spirit. Duran (2018) goes on to say:

> First and foremost, [Tenskwatawa] denounced the drinking of alcohol as poison and accursed. In addition to this proscription, he preached against the rising incidence of internal and external tribal violence, sexual promiscuity, and polygamous marriages. The Shawnee Prophet … preached the return of traditional Shawnee ritual and ceremonial practices … Abstinence was the first precept taught since alcohol consumption was paramount among the evil white ways that Natives would have to abandon in order to return to a state of equilibrium with the Master of Life, with fellow tribal members, and with other tribes. Alcohol was associated with assimilation and, like other white cultural artifacts, such as food and clothing, was condemned as a threat to Native identity (p. 123).

For the participants or the participants' Ancestors, the Spirit of Indigeneity's call to healing is initiated by breaking the problematic substance use cycle, which requires separating

from colonial coping (i.e., problematic substance use), which acts as a sedative and painkiller to one's emotions (Maté, 2015). Disengaging with problematic substances is the initial criterion to answer one's call to healing. A common expression in trauma healing is "One needs to be able to feel to heal." Disengaging from substances used for numbing feelings allows one to engage in "feeling for healing."

The perspective of being able to feel to heal is a school of thought that is widely supported by many theories of psychology, including the earliest works of Freud (1910), with psychoanalytic theory. It has been reconfirmed in a myriad of other psychological theories, including emotional-focused therapy (Greenberg, 2011), mindfulness and acceptance-based therapies (Hayes et al., 2004), trauma research (van der Kolk, 2015), grief and loss literature (Kübler-Ross, 1973), neuroscience and emotional processing evidence (LeDoux, 1996), and research on self-compassion and emotional healing (Neff, 2011). This is why discontinued use of problematic substances for the purpose of coping with colonial traumas is necessary, though painful, as they act as a painkiller, disconnecting one from one's emotional, spiritual, psychological, mental, and physical experience (Maté, 2012). Without the numbing agent of problematic substances, all participants could be with their experience to consciously engage in healing.

After the criterion for the disengagement with problematic substances for coping was met, all participants were required to answer the Spirit of Indigeneity call to healing. No one is exempt from the historical and ongoing colonial trauma wounds. With this initial phase of the discontinuation of problematic substance use, and in the coming phases, participants articulated how they engaged in breaking colonial trauma cycles in themselves and their families. To break

the cycle is transformative for oneself, one's family, and community (Broderick, 1988; Stob et al., 2020). The individual breaking a negative generational cycle is known as a *transitional character* (Magarrell, 1994). Transitional characters, as Magarrell (1994) notes, are the individuals who halt the transmission of dysfunctional patterns. The transitional character promotes the "non-transmission of dysfunctional patterns by individuals who make significant changes in their behaviours, compared to what they experienced in their families of origin" (p. 5).

Furthermore, Magarrell (1994) observes that, in her research, transitional characters were tightly woven with spirituality; transitions are a "spiritual" experience or, as I have come to understand from this research, the Spirit of Indigeneity calling one to become the transitional character. For example, as Participant L shared, "I was living a bad lifestyle and a lot of drinking, and I was on the radar of social workers. I didn't want my son in foster care, as I was raised." This rhetoric was common among the participants; either they themselves were the ones who stopped the transmission of alcohol use and many traumas, or they inherited the non-transmission from their Ancestors who served as the transitional character in their family. For the transitional characters (TCs), from Magarrell's (1994) perspective:

> The spiritual experience both took something away and it gave something back. The spiritual experience had power. A part of that spiritual experience was a major enlightened understanding that influenced the TCs into letting go of anger and a false sense of responsibility, and also gave them an increased sense of self-worth, of being a person of values, and power, and a person who could do things. It gave substance and support to the feeling that they could make change in their lives. A person of great worth

> is a person who can now make a transitional leap. So spiritual experience helped them to get rid of negative residuals and crystalize positive directions to the extent that they could then be described as transitional characters (p. 63).

Transitional characters are individuals who, despite being raised in trauma, dysfunction, and unhealthy family patterns, are able to stop the negative and harmful generational pattern from continuing, intercept it and shift the trajectory to positive change for future generations and those around them (Broderick, 1988; Magarrell, 1994). In this phase, the individual is either the transitional character or someone in their family. TCs are transitional because they are transformative within the ancestral line and future generations (Magarrell, 1994). The healing of a TC is inherited by future generations.

The data in this study were clear; no individual is exempt from colonial trauma, even if the previous generation answered the call by stopping problematic substance use. The reality is that, because colonial traumas have been enacted for generations, even if one generation breaks a cycle, as was the case for Participant D, in the example above, there are still many colonial trauma cycles that need to be broken in order to heal.

The compounded trauma cannot all be resolved in one generation, considering colonial traumas are still being enacted. So, even if the previous generation addressed historical and personal traumas and broke the cycle of problematic substance use, Indigenous people are unavoidably still being traumatized by their personal experiences of existing in the harmful and violent colonial context. Gabor Maté (2022) states that the Western culture (contemporary colonial Canada) in which we live is inherently traumatizing for everyone, and exponentially so for marginalized and non-dominant groups (Brach, 2019). Maté (2022) explains:

> I have come to believe that behind the entire epidemic of chronic afflictions, mental and physical, that beset our current moment, something is amiss in our [Western] culture itself, generating both the rash of ailments we are suffering and, crucially, the ideological blind spots that keep us from seeing our predicament clearly … These blind spots, prevalent throughout the culture but endemic to a tragic extent … keep us ignorant of the connections that bind our health to our social-emotional lives. Another way of saying it; chronic illness—mental or physical—is to a large extent a function or feature of the way things are and not a glitch; a consequence of how we live, not a mysterious aberration … I am using "toxic culture" to characterize … the entire context of social structures, belief systems, assumptions, and values that surround us and necessarily pervade every aspect of our lives (para 1).

Research specific to the Indigenous context validates the ongoing colonial trauma socio-cultural context, which is steeped in racism and discrimination—an unavoidable experience for Indigenous people and one that is inescapably wounding. Therefore, even if one's Ancestors broke many of the cycles, the socio-cultural environment continues to have harmful impacts upon one's wellness (Currie et al., 2012; Maté, 2022). Research is reflecting specific challenges faced by Indigenous people. Critical race theory demonstrates how the ongoing lived experience of colonization is embedded within White supremacy for people of colour, including Indigenous people. Whether White supremacy is enacted systemically or individually, through microaggressions or overt discrimination, the compounded impacts are unquestionably traumatizing (Currie et al., 2012; Sue, 2010). Currie et al. (2012) explain that, in Canada, Indigenous people experience discrimination and racism at rates two to three times higher than

Latino or African reference groups. The prolific experiences of racism that are encountered frequently, while at the same time being highly unpredictable, may account for the disproportionate representation of psychological distress and mental and physical health challenges by Indigenous populations (Currie et al., 2012). Currie et al. (2012) note that the myriad of racist encounters results in racial battle fatigue:

> Consistent with this research, qualitative findings from our study suggest the frequency and unpredictability of racist experiences had adverse psychological impacts on Aboriginal students. Participant reactions to discrimination were symptomatic of what has been termed racial battle fatigue … Racial battle fatigue describes the depletion of mental and physical resources caused by stress response systems that are constantly switched on as minorities strive to cope with ongoing discrimination (p. 618).

Postcolonial and cultural trauma research looks at the socio-cultural context and the impacts on marginalized and oppressed populations and confirms the colonial context is inherently traumatizing for the colonized group. This first gained academic awareness through the work of Frantz Fanon (1961) and has been continually confirmed by more contemporary scholars, such as Utsey et al. (2015) and Currie et al. (2019). Utsey et al. (2015) provide essential context from Ghana, which has striking similarities to the colonization of Canada, in that the ongoing colonial context is a constant reminder in the present day, which has a negative psychological impact. Utsey et al. (2015) note that:

> Researchers have demonstrated a link between the experience of oppression under colonization and mental health … *There are countless colonial legacies in Ghana which work as primes, serving as constant reminders of the colonization experience for current*

> *generations*. For example, the continuous use of the English language as the official language of instruction in institutions of higher learning, and as a language of commerce may indirectly suggest that Ghanaians are still dependent on the colonial framework for institutional structure and stability. This recognition creates a psychological conflict for young adults who are far removed from the actual colonization experience. It is as if Ghanaians who are living several years after the actual colonization are being made to participate in two physical and cultural worlds; one of the indigenous culture and that of the colonial legacy (Bulhan, 1985; Cabral, 1973; David, 2008; David & Okazaki, 2010; Freire, 2007; Memmi, 1965; Okazaki et al., 2008, as cited in Utsey et al., 2015, p. 213; emphasis added).

However, Utsey et al.'s (2015) research contrasts with my own research in terms of understanding contemporary colonization, as outlined in the italicized sentence above. I would argue that not only are there constant reminders of the residue of historical colonization in Canada, but there also needs to be recognition of the ways in which colonization is continually instituted today. Similarly, Alfred and Corntassel (2005) contend that:

> The challenge of "being Indigenous," in a psychic and cultural sense, forms the crucial question facing Indigenous peoples today in the era of contemporary colonialism—a form of post-modern imperialism in which domination is still the Settler imperative but where colonizers have designed and practice more subtle means (in contrast to the earlier forms of missionary and militaristic colonial enterprises) of accomplishing their objectives (p. 597).

Researchers affirm that colonization is alive, and is continually enacted and maintained (Brach, 2019; Currie et al., 2019). Experiences of oppression and discrimination are traumatizing and are inherently difficult for Indigenous people to escape, both historically and in the present day. My research suggests that Indigenous individuals are continually exposed to colonial violence. The participants' responses suggest that virtually every Indigenous person is touched by colonialization. Because colonization is systemic, colonial trauma is inescapable; therefore, it could be suggested that every Indigenous person is harmed and could benefit from healing. The call to healing calls the individual to become who they intended to be, to become the father or mother they were meant to be, as is evident in the data. They and their Spirit are not self-determining their lives; as Participant M earlier explained, he was living as a victim, relying heavily on drug use and cycles of violence, and he realized he had to change.

Many of the participants were living what I have come to learn were trauma-determined lives of survival under a colonial trance. When someone is living more or less appropriately, but surviving through the execution of their developed psychological coping strategies to trauma, it is known as a "trance" (Brach, 2019). Trauma, rather than Spirit, is guiding their lives. The participants demonstrated that, with the call to the Spirit of Indigeneity answered, the next phase was to purge colonial poisons.

Phase One Implications

There are two significant implications of this phase. First, a specific Indigenous healing process is situated in the Spirit of Indigeneity, which starts with a calling and response, which no one can intentionally curate. It comes from within the individual themselves, their Spirit. I have always known that we cannot save people suffering within a colonial trance and living trauma-

determined lives. As much as we want to, we cannot save people from themselves. This research offers a new perspective that is rooted in an Indigenous Spirit calling for healing. This research calls for further study into Indigenous Spirit calling work. Suppose someone's call to healing is within the Spiritual realm. In that case, there may be ways that the Spiritual practices that promote the Spirit of Indigeneity could potentially help to elicit and support someone to receive and hear their call to healing. What I am saying is that someone's call is in the realm of Spirit. Forcing someone with Western medical intervention who lacks Spirit will not support the connection to one's Spirit calling. Therefore, we look to the Spirit of Indigenous culture as the catalyst to enter this phase.

This research suggested a similar significance of the transitional character and cycle breaking, which is inspiring, motivating, and liberating. The research demonstrated how one person within a familial line can change the trajectory of the entire family. It has previously been argued that trauma is inherited (Atlas, 2023; Meaney & Aitken, 1985), but this research demonstrates that the opposite is also true; healing is inherited.

Phase Two: Purging Colonial Poisons

> The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image.
>
> Freire (1970), *Pedagogy of the oppressed.*

Coming into this research, I was ignorant of many things; specifically, the process and necessity of healing colonial trauma. I was so ignorant, in fact, that at the outset of this research, I aimed to avoid that necessity entirely, as my research questions focused specifically on wellness, not the necessary healing that was intrinsic to and unavoidable for Indigenous people. I

had an awareness of the research on internalized colonization; however, all the research I read was relatively abstract in nature. Through this research, the abstract became pragmatic. I came to see the complex and detailed untangling that had to happen across the domains of colonized culture, internalized colonization, and colonized harmful relations. I offer the explicit narratives to the reader to serve as documented examples that take place within this current colonial sociocultural context. This chapter was like a punch to the gut, a reckoning with the reality of the systemic harm caused by colonization, which is unavoidable and undeserved, and is inflicted upon Indigenous people from birth. This harm spans the sociocultural environment, as Indigenous people exist within a systemic colonial White supremacist context that continues to impact individuals within every layer, relationally and personally, as a result of the internalized racism and colonial trauma (Brach, 2004; Currie et al., 2019). Tejeda et al. (2003) explain:

> The dominant economic, cultural, political, judicial, and educational arrangements in contemporary American society are those of an internal neocolonialism produced by the mutually reinforcing systems of colonial and capitalist domination and exploitation that have organized social relations throughout the history of what today constitutes the United States (p. 12).

And the situation would be similar in Canada, yet it remains the responsibility of the individual person to heal by addressing the personal and relational impacts of colonization. The participants demonstrate their effort to remove the residues of colonization so they can move forward in healing and wellness.

Through an analysis of the research, I came to view colonization as a poison that is coercively administered without consent or choice, poisoning the body, mind, and Spirit.

Bowden (2013) shares a similar perspective that colonization is a poison. Indeed, Bowden (2013) cites Las Casas, who used metaphor as the title of his article, “Poisons disguised with honey: European expansion and the sacred trust of civilization.” Here, Bowden (2013) illustrates how colonization deceived Indigenous people with colonial honey, noting that “The sacred trust and concomitant civilizing missions were inevitably and invariably violent and went against the very idea of civilization … Much of the reasoning underpinning the sacred trust was in the form of ‘poisons disguised with honey’” (p. 151). Along a similar vein, Dione and Ousmane (2024) call colonization a toxin that infects victims, akin to poisoning; “The colonial toxin has seeped in their cultural vessel and infected the black lymphocytes that are the main agents for the psychological, economic, political, and cultural immunization of the oppressed” (p. 523).

This phase’s essence seeks to remove the colonial poisons so the Spirit of Indigeneity can become the guiding beacon in one’s life. Colonial poison had horrific consequences that made individuals, families, and communities chronically ill, and once removed, health and cultural wellness can be reclaimed. It is common sense that when something is making a person sick, one way for them to become well is to purge. For example, it is like purging spoiled food that is causing food poisoning. In this model, spoiled food is the colonial poison that manifests as internalized colonization; similar to purging spoiled food in order to become well, colonization needs to be purged. Colonization is purged across three domains; colonized culture, personally, as internalized colonization, and with one’s relations, as harmful colonized relations.

Table 7

Purging Colonial Poisons: An Overview

Domain	Themes
Purging colonized culture	Calls for the removal of: Colonized Indigenous culture Colonial values Colonized language Colonial religion Colonial land boundaries Colonial Indigenous group identity
Purging internalized colonization	Calls for the removal of: Colonized Indigenous personal identity Colonial shame Conditioned helplessness Colonial coping Colonized masculinity
Purging harmful colonized relations	

Colonial poisoning spans generations, resulting in intergenerational colonial trauma. Kellerman's (2013) research demonstrates the epigenetic transmission of trauma through generations of Holocaust survivors who experienced genocide; while not the same as Indigenous colonization, there are similarities (i.e., genocidal trauma). Kellerman (2013) maintains:

> The Holocaust left its visible and invisible marks not only on the survivors, but also on their children. Instead of numbers tattooed on their forearms, however, they are marked epigenetically with a chemical coating upon their chromosomes, which represent a kind of biological memory of what the parents experienced (p. 1).

Colonial poison also happened on an individual level from the cumulative life experience of existing in a colonial context. As Currie et al. (2019) demonstrate, racist colonial experiences begin in childhood; "Most Indigenous adults (72.3%) experienced racial discrimination some or

most of the time in childhood. The frequency of child discrimination was significantly associated with allostatic load" (p. 4). Allostatic load is a measure of chronic stress; in this context, it is attributed to the racism that compromises one's safety, nervous system, and psychological and biological health (Walsh, 2022), resulting in trauma that becomes internalized and manifests as internalized colonial trauma. There is literature suggesting the creation of a new *DSM-IV* classification for oppression-based trauma diagnosis that recognizes racism, discrimination, and oppression as a category within trauma (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005). Allostatic load has the same impact on the nervous system, and can be seen in internalized colonization, which results in a chronic dysregulated nervous system (Currie et al., 2019), relying on the parasympathetic system—the survival brain—to run on autopilot. This is explained by the similar idea of the generalized unsafety theory of stress (GUTS). This theory is that the stress response is a default response to a threat or a person's perceptions of a stressor, termed "perseverative cognition" (Brosschot et al., 2006). GUTS proposes that chronic stress is mostly automatic, and that an unconscious perception of generalized unsafety (GU) can create longer-term biological dysregulation (Brosschot et al., 2016). This theory offers an explanation for chronic disease caused by chronic stress when no threat is imminent.

The findings from the present study aligned with the research noted above; the colonial context, both historical and current, is wounding, and requires one to live in a survival state. This chronic ongoing survival state is the baseline for one's life. This research reveals that, without healing, internalized colonization and colonial trauma determine one's life, and the individual is left in what I have come to understand as a "colonial trance." A trance can have both positive and negative connotations. From a Western perspective, trance is normally associated with

imbalance, illness and psychosis; “those who ‘experience’ possession or trance are demonized or regarded as mentally unstable” (Schmidt & Huskinson, 2010, p. 12). From an Indigenous perspective, involuntary trance is not common, and trances that are known are associated with consensual spiritual insights and engagement (Kingfisher, 2019). However, in this research, trance has a spiritual impact and is a result of nonconsensual, poison-causing, colonial “dis-ease.” This research names the strategic colonial trance, which has poisoned the individual, disconnecting them from cultural wellness and Indigenous Spirit, and internalized colonization, which can be understood as the colonial trance. This type of trance does have a negative association and impact; it is not voluntary, and it is getting in the way of the Spirit of Indigeneity that aligns with Brach’s (2004) understanding and use of trance. Brach (2004) named it “the trance of unworthiness,” which has strong parallels, including its impact on the Spirit. Internalized colonization, which I have come to understand as the *colonial trance*, is similar to the trance of unworthiness; however, the colonial trance is unique to the Indigenous experience and colonial trauma and its impact on the Spirit of Indigeneity.

Tara Brach (2004) dedicates a chapter in her book, *Radical acceptance,* to the idea that a trance becomes a state of being divergent from one’s true self. The trance develops as a result of one’s survival coping mechanisms and sociocultural context, which disconnects the person from themselves, others, and life itself without the person’s awareness. Brach (2004) makes a direct tie to the sociocultural context that contributes to and reinforces trance. The trance Brach (2004) focuses on is the trance of unworthiness, which makes one feel shame, self-hatred, disconnected, alien, and not belonging to oneself or the world. This trance either shows up as someone feeling

less than or better than; an imbalance of self-worth (Thira, 2019)—much like the impacts of internalized colonization. Brach (2004) describes the trance:

> We seem to be protagonists in a pre-scripted drama, fated to react to our circumstances in a given way. We seem unaware that choices and options may exist … We are living in our waking dream that completely defines and delimits our experience of life … Inherent in the trance is the belief that no matter how hard we try, we are always, in some way, falling short. Feeling unworthy goes hand in hand with the feeling separate from others, separate from life. If we are defective, how can we possibly belong? It's a vicious cycle; the more deficient we feel, the more separate and vulnerable we feel. Underneath our fear of being flawed is a more primal fear that something is wrong with life, that something bad is going to happen. Our reaction to this fear is to feel blame, even hatred, toward whatever we consider the source of the problem; ourselves, others, and life itself. But even when we have directed aversion outward, deep down we still feel vulnerable.
>
> Our feelings of alienation from others give rise to various forms of suffering. For some the most glaring expression is addiction. It may be alcohol, food or drugs … The belief that we are deficient and unworthy makes it difficult to trust that we are truly loved. Many of us live with an undercurrent of depression or hopelessness about ever feeling close to other people … We yearn for an unquestioned experience of belonging, to feel at home with ourselves and others, at ease and fully accepted. But the trance of unworthiness keeps the sweetness of belonging out of reach. And the trance of unworthiness intensifies when our lives feel painful and out of control (p. 7).

Brach (2004) goes on to describe with specificity how the trance of unworthiness is inherent in Western culture and is further exacerbated for marginalized and oppressed populations:

> Because so many of us grew up without a cohesive and nourishing sense of family, neighborhood, community or "tribe," it is not surprising that we feel like outsiders, on our own and disconnected … The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis but rather the feeling of not belonging. In our own society, this disease has reached epidemic proportions. We long to belong and feel as if we don't deserve to (p. 10).

Similarly, Speight (2007) describes internalized oppression as an unconscious psychological state—similar to a colonial trance—where one is absorbed into the vacuum of oppression and exploitation and feels that they deserve a life that is dominated by suffering and challenges. This becomes a normal existence, and the individual believes that they are to blame for their circumstances. Speight (2007) argues that one of the most significant psychological consequences of systemic oppression is a "lack of critical consciousness preventing one from seeing the destructive social context and accept the dominant group's exploitation" (p. 131). Without an understanding of colonial oppression, the oppressed group rationalizes injustice by believing that the target group's social and cultural inferiority is the cause of marginalization rather than systemic colonialism. This psychological injury in turn deeply impacts how individuals and communities form ideas and associate attributes to their culture and cultural identity (Kasad, 2023; Okazaki et al., 2008).

It is in this colonial trance that internalized colonization is experienced. There is agreement that colonization, oppression, and racism become internalized, and once absorbed,

there is a deep sense of inherent unworthiness (Speight, 2007). This was articulated by the participants in this research; for example, Participant J emphasized that she knew there was something inherently wrong with being Native, so she, and her family members who could, sought to "pass" as White.

Colonial mentality, another name for internalized colonization, explained the impact on the colonized group; "Internalized colonial ideologies affect the psychological wellbeing and cultural identity of oppressed groups … as a result of colonization, oppressed groups internalize racialized negative attitudes about their ethnic and racial group (Kasad, 2023, p. 5). There are many names for internalized colonization, including *colonial mentality* (Quimpo, 2000), *internalized racism* (Speight, 2007), and *internalized oppression* (Kasad, 2023), all of which, I have come to understand, are the outcomes of colonial poison on the oppressed. David and Okazaki (2010) name colonial mentality as the phenomenon that occurs when one absorbs the negative, harmful beliefs about one's cultural and ethnic inferiority communicated by the colonizers. This internalization has horrific impacts including the degradation of self, family, and community, culture, and it provokes people to behave in colonizing ways to others. Additionally, the continued acceptance and tolerance of ongoing colonization continues (Utsey et al., 2015). Nadal (2011) suggests that the impacts are manifested as harmful behaviours, like violence and bullying, because one might try to become the colonizer and employ colonizing tactics in an effort to overcome one's own oppression. Mental health challenges and maladaptive behaviour also lead to deeply entrenched shame and embarrassment of oneself and one's culture (Boahen, 1987; Mullan, 2023). Brach (2019) and Thira (2009) go beyond the harmful psychological and

physiological impacts to include one's sense of self, heart and mind, and their Spirit becoming twisted.

The internalization of colonization happens when the dominant views of the oppressor and colonizer (i.e., White supremacy) create false beliefs about a population and when the colonizer regards that population as inferior (Freire, 1970). One of the most destructive and insidious consequences of colonialism happens when the colonized begin to think, feel, and act like the colonizer, particularly as the situation relates to the stereotypes and prejudices of themselves and their own people (Gonzalez et al., 2014, p. 32). Those beliefs then become absorbed and lived out by the people upon whom they are projected. It is a perverse phenomenon that "colonization is the twisting of a peoples' heart, mind, body, and Spirit and way of life for the benefit of the colonizer" (Thira, 2021, p. 5). Internalized oppression and colonization poison one's identity, thoughts, behaviours, nervous system, and worldview (Boahen, 1987; Brach, 2019; Memmi, 1965; Utsey et al., 2015). As the exploratory results suggest, purging colonial poison removes the internalization of colonization from 1) culture, 2) oneself—heart, body, mind, and Spirit, and 3) relations. With the colonial poison cleansed, individuals can heal by reclaiming what was stolen by colonization in the next phase of reclamation. This discussion will now move into the first of three of the major domains, purging colonized Indigenous culture.

Purging Colonized Indigenous Culture

Colonized culture is the twisting of Indigenous culture through the lens of the colonizer and then embraced by Indigenous people themselves as their own (Thira, personal communication, August 3, 2024). Colonized culture emerged from the data and illuminated a

contemporary taboo idea; culture can be harmful, given the colonial history and colonial context. As Participant J stated:

> So, culture isn't necessarily a source [of wellness]—culture and cultural practice can be a source of wellness or harm … it's the underlying values and Indigenous values that are different than the Western that will determine [that] if it is wellness-promoting it is Indigenous or if does not promote wellness it's probably colonized culture—so, it's the values underlying that determine wellness … So, there's that, which I'm discerning about which cultural practices I want to have in my life, right, and which ones that I don't espouse if they are colonized … Some practices that I see or have experienced seem very patriarchal, for example, and I don't think that they contribute to women's overall … sense of agency. Right? So, you're constantly looking at as culture evolves and changes or even how it was interpreted or understood or remembered from the past; it may or may not be accurate, but you have your own internal compass of values that guides what you're embracing as culture as you're weaving your culture back together.

We need to acknowledge the colonial poison to Indigenous culture or colonization, and Indigenous culture will not be able to be untangled and separated to be purged; it will continue to be twisted, tangled, and inseparable, continuing to colonize. When culture is used as a means to an end, motivated by ego, culture is missing Spirit; this reflects internalized colonization and colonized culture. As Brach (2004) suggests, "The problem is that ego can convert anything to its own use, even spirituality" (p. 9). This notion can be applied to Indigenous culture. The only way we know that culture is well is when it is guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity; not only by

tradition and protocols, but also by the original source of the traditions and protocols, the Spirit of Indigeneity (D. Thira, personal communication, August 3, 2024).

This dissertation represents one small act to disentangle colonized culture from an Indigenous culture rooted in Indigenous Spirit. Colonized culture is distinguishable in a few ways, to which participants cleverly alluded in their examples of *white-knuckle culture* and *weaponized culture*.

There is scant, if any, literature on the topics of internalized colonization and white-knuckle culture. Darien Thira introduced me to the term *white-knuckle grip culture* over the course of many workshops and interactions. The term *white knuckle* also comes up in other contexts, including parenting and mental health. In parenting, it is used to describe extremely rigid parenting styles (Peterson, 2021). In mental health, it is used as a response to something tense or scary (Kolber, 2020). The literal act and origin of the term, *white knuckles*, describes gripping fiercely to something for dear life, so much so that one's knuckles turn white from loss of circulation. In the context of colonization and cultural genocide, the outcome of internalized colonization manifesting as white-knuckle culture makes complete sense. Of course, people are anxiously and ferociously hanging onto culture. However, to separate colonization from Indigenous culture, there needs to be a softening so that separation of colonial poison can be dissected; one's grip must loosen.

The participants illuminated white-knuckle culture when they highlighted the importance of the Spirit in which culture is engaged and the underlying values promoted and exercised. Within this example, weaponized culture is also exemplified. Weaponizing something is to adapt it from the original source to use it as a weapon of harm. Weaponizing does not have to be

intentional; I surmise that it can be an outcome of internalized colonization without ill harm. Weaponization in culture is somewhat taboo but became apparent when participants noted that culture can be harmful because of colonization that has poisoned it. As previously mentioned, Participant J directly suggested that culture can be weaponized; "I have experienced so-called 'culture' being used as a way of discriminating against women and keeping women sort of in their place, like Western Society, and I don't think that's right. That is the colonized culture and is not cultural and reinforces the Western values." Culture can be harmful or helpful, depending on the underlying values that are being exercised and that some aspects of culture have been twisted because of colonization to promote and perpetuate colonial values, protocols, and practices that masquerade as Indigenous, such as oppression of women. A cultural practice that promotes colonial values such as oppression is Indigenous culture that has become weaponized. Baskin (2020) notes the harm of internalized culture that becomes weaponized. While Baskin (2020) does not use the term *weaponized* itself, the ideas underlying the absorption and perpetuation of colonial values that are so-called "Indigenous," "traditional," or "cultural" is evident and harmful:

> Violence toward Indigenous women and girls continues to be a tool of the colonial state while many Indigenous peoples have internalized patriarchal beliefs, which manifests in the way they view women's identities. This article argues that patriarchy may have infiltrated so-called "traditional teachings" that dictate rules about women's participation in spiritual and cultural practices. It highlights the voices of Indigenous women who discuss this exclusion and how they are taking back their power (p. 15).

It was suggested by these dissertation findings, and exemplified by Baskin (2020), that a consistent decolonizing lens be applied to Indigenous culture so colonized strands that are poisoning Indigenous culture can be pulled out. Individuals who hold cultural practices and protocols may need to release the white-knuckle grip so this can occur. In addition, there is an opportunity for broader sociocultural acknowledgement of colonized culture from the respective Nations, communities, and families who hold cultural Wisdom. There could be a willingness to take a critical Indigenous values-led lens and apply it to any one practice, tradition, or protocol to evaluate the underlying values which are being promoted and upheld, and to make necessary adaptations.

Purging Colonial Values

Values are components of culture; colonization buried the Indigenous worldview and, within it, its values (Walker, 2004). For healing and wellness, Rahm (2014) calls for the uprising of Indigenous values again; with the colonial values purged, Indigenous values can re-emerge. Within the dissertation data, Participant M challenges the idea that the values embedded within capitalism will lead to wellness; “Values of capitalism, what capitalism is … A certain amount of satisfaction is gained from that, but I don’t think you would ever feel totally well.” In the literature, and within this dissertation data, the paradoxical discrepancy between Western and Indigenous values has been recognized and to promote one set of values is to resist the other (Barnhardt, 1998; Rahm, 2014; Suzuki & Knudston, 1993). Rahm (2014) argues that “generalized characteristics of Indigenous and Western worldviews exist, and when juxtaposed, their differences become even more apparent” (p. 27). The idea is that the Western worldview

and corresponding values are diseased. The way forward to healing for Indigenous people and colonizers is through purging the colonial worldview and Indigenizing for all:

> Awakening the Western mind, indigenizing the colonizer, and rethinking wellness combine to shift the vantage point of the West and shape a new worldview. It is a philosophical proposition but meant for our immediate application. There is an urgent need for unity, not sameness, and that point cannot be stressed enough (Rahm, 2014, p. 156).

The juxtaposing of Indigenous and Western worldviews uncovers the embedded values that are also in juxtaposition. Rahm (2014) argues that the Western worldview is characterized as linear, mechanistic, analytic, scientifically derived, and time-oriented, and the Indigenous is circular, fluid, relational, orally transmitted and nature-based. Barnhardt (1998, as cited in Rahm, 2014) offers the following broad comparison of the principles that guide Indigenous and Western worldviews.

Table 8

Indigenous and Western Worldviews

Spirituality is embedded in all elements of the cosmos	Spirituality is centered on a supreme being
Humans have the responsibility of maintaining a harmonious relationship with the natural world	Humans exercise domination over nature to use it for personal and economic gain
There is a need for reciprocity between humans and the natural world Resources are viewed as gifts	Natural resources are viewed as available for unilateral exploitation
Nature is honoured routinely through daily spiritual practice	Spiritual practices are intermittent and set apart from daily life

Human thought, feelings, and words are inextricably bound to all other aspects of the universe	Human thought, feelings, and words are formed apart from all other aspects of the universe and the surrounding world
The human role is to participate in the orderly designs of nature	The human role is to dissect the orderly designs of nature and analyze and manipulate nature for our own ends
Respect for Elders is based on respect Respect for others is based on their compassion Respect for chronological old age Inner-directed knowledge	Respect for others is based on material achievement and chronological old age
Sense of empathy and kinship with other forms of life	Sense of separateness and superiority over other forms of life
View the relationship of humans with nature as a continuous, two-way transactional dialogue	View relationships with humans to nature as a one-way, hierarchical imperative

It becomes apparent, when looking at Barnhardt's (1998) presentation of the worldviews, that the participants were illustrating the Western values they had purged. As Participant S stated; "Money is part of the White man's world, and so it's going to go along with the White man's thinking and the White man's views of success. But, as Native people, I don't think we should measure ourselves that way." Participants articulated ridding themselves of Western values, including material achievement, separateness, economic gain, and exploitation and domination of nature and others. Purging the colonial Western worldview and embedded values is indicative of healing.

Purging Colonized Language

This research honours the importance of Indigenous languages in healing and wellness, as Indigenous languages hold the foundations of culture. Shakib (2011) notes the interconnectedness between language and culture; "Language as communication and as culture [are] then products of each other, and language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (p. 117).

However, participants in this research cautioned that language could be colonized and cause further internalized colonization. Simply translating English words for equivalence or "near-likes" is colonizing language and self, and the richness of the culture is absent. As Smith (2012) explains, learning a language is more than translating is learning the Indigenous worldview; "Native languages, despite being suppressed by policies and practices of cultural hegemony, allow Indigenous philosophies, mythologies, and metaphors to be understood, embodied, and applied within cultural contexts that are experiential and not adequately translatable" (p. 29). Shakib (2011) advances a similar message, that culture and language go hand-in-hand without embedding the language in the worldview, and vice versa. Learning Indigenous language is also unweaving colonial thought within this colonial-dominating context. Shakib (2011) explains:

> Language is thus inseparable from us as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world … Being aware of importance of language and cultural domination, during their colonialism, colonialists

> try to convey their thought, beliefs and their customs through language as a cultural tool in an invisible and imperceptible way (p. 117).

Participant S noted that "Healing is decolonizing language. Yes, learn an Indigenous language, but learn it through an Indigenous worldview, as much as possible."

Purging Colonial Religion

The indoctrination of colonial religion was a primary strategy to implement genocide and colonialism of Indigenous people (Lackey, 2002; Roberts, 2012). In the data, it became apparent that there was a differentiation between Indigenous spirituality and colonial religion, and one determining factor was that colonial religion was rooted in fear, shame, and control. The conversion to colonial religion was pervasive (Smith, 2005) and systemic (Roberts, 2012) and it poisoned consciousness. Roberts (2012) writes that conversion is "a colonization of consciousness" and that "religious conversion is an intrinsically violative act—and, moreover, that it amounts to an outside 'takeover' of the convert's consciousness" (p. 272).

Religion is inseparable from power control, and the politics and political oppression that invalidated Indigenous people as inferior ultimately created social consciousness. According to Lackey (2002), "Church establishes a sophisticated system of political oppression within the colonized land, that colonization and evangelization work hand in hand, and that the colonizer's God creates humans as inferior or superior" (para 1). One of the critiques of colonial religion that emerged from the data was its fear-based nature. Barash (2020) explains the fear within religions that sometimes implies that God is the source of man's horrific suffering for man's wrongdoings; "God's wrath can be discerned in natural disasters, from epidemics to floods, hurricanes, and so forth, although denied in some quarters, is widespread, especially among fundamentalists and

evangelicals" (Barash, 2020, p. 38). Barash (2020) explains that religion is woven with fear in order to control:

> Religions, especially the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have long used the threat of hell to terrify, manipulate, and thus control believers. Western holiday music, ostensibly Christian but largely secular, contains this mild remonstrance; "He sees you when you're sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He knows if you've been bad or good, so be good, for goodness sake!" … Although it is widely believed that a signal quality of Christianity is its focus on love, kindness, and forgiveness, this is to some extent belied by the focus on anger, violence, and retribution, not only in the afterlife, but especially in this life as a means of intimidating the living (p. 38).

Shame from colonial religion was the next quality from the data that emerged that required purging. The shame that has been tethered to colonial religion has been acknowledged in the literature. There are first-hand accounts and theorized literature to demonstrate the approach to enforcing shame through religion. Linklater (2017) shares the direct voice of a survivor who articulates the shame that poisoned Indigenous children:

> The nuns and priests told us endlessly that we were savages, pagans, and heathens. They were relentless in savaging us as people … They shouted the phrase "Eigh, sauvage" at us over and over! It was extremely insulting to be called "sauvage" all the time and to be constantly told that we were dumb and uneducable—The priests and nuns taught us that all people are basically evil sinners, and they must be redeemed through following the teachings of Jesus Christ. I once asked, "If Jesus was really human, then mustn't He have been a sinner and evil like the rest of us?" For asking questions like this, we were

> punished … The nuns and priests had a very clear vision of what they wanted to do with us. The constant punishments we received were not really for the rules we broke or the things we did wrong; we were really being punished for who we are as Anishinaabe-Ojibway (p. 17).

Colonial religion was not about teaching right and wrong. It was about teaching innocent children that they are intrinsically and fundamentally flawed and that their existence is wrong and bad (Linklater, 2017), which is the essence of shame (Brown, 2012). Not only was colonial religion violently executed through residential schools, but the values and teachings within the colonial religion itself added another layer of shame. Robbins (2004) demonstrates the contrast in cultural values from many Indigenous paradigms and epistemologies and colonially religion. This contrast and the requirement, through coercion and colonization, to embrace colonial religion and laws affirms Indigenous shame, as adopting the laws and values of the colonial religion means an intrinsic acceptance of the badness in oneself and one's epistemologies, and values wrongdoers as sinners. Robbins (2004) writes:

> The Urapmin strive for moral perfection to attain salvation. Here, the conflict between the Indigenous Urapmin cultural system and the Christian cultural system becomes manifest. In traditional Urapmin culture, the law was based on a set of prohibitions, and social life was seen as a balance between willfulness and lawfulness. The Christian code of behaviour parallels the traditional code of behaviour, although some traditional taboos had to be abandoned. However, there is a huge difference in moral subjectivity. Whereas in Urapmin perception, willfulness is accepted when oriented towards positive social action, in Christian morality willfulness is always condemned and sinful. Christian

> morality is an internalized morality. In Christian ethics there can be no individual will because one is supposed to do God's will, which will lead to salvation. Therefore, the Urapmin constantly have a heavy feeling of being sinners (p. 389).

Patriarchy is another theme that emerged from the literature that is distinct to colonial religion that could benefit from being purged; God is the almighty patriarch, and that concept trickles down and is reflected in politics and all systems of the colonial state to families. Daly (1993) explains how the biblical God is the foundation of patriarchy:

> The biblical and popular image of God as the great patriarch in heaven, rewarding and punishing according to his mysterious and seemingly arbitrary will, has dominated the imagination of millions over thousands of years. The symbol of the father god, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has, in turn, rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting. If God in "his" heaven is a father ruling "his" people, then it is in the "nature" of things and according to the divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated (p. 13).

Lastly, the separation and individuation of men emerged from the literature regarding colonial religion, which is not in alignment with what was heard from the participants. Some literature has demonstrated that colonial religion is the impetus for the epistemology of separation and the positioning of humans at the top of the hierarchy of beings, which is incongruent with the Indigenous epistemology of interconnectedness and the natural world. The teaching of God as the center of everything teaches individuation and individuality, which is understood as a disorder by Bouchilloux (2003); "Religion teaches us that man, created by and

for God, is everything to himself and places himself at the centre of everything. Thus, it is that disorder is born … Each self would like to act in the role of tyrant over all the others" (p. 202).

Colonial religion centers on man and decenters nature—which includes women—as an object. Nature is understood as inherently lacking in meaning; what meaning it possesses is imposed upon it by human beings. The notion of agency itself comes to be defined in terms of human subjectivity (Asad, 1993; Bouchilloux, 2003; Geertz, 1973; Taylor, 1985). Nature is de-emphasized and assigned new meanings (i.e., resources), because it is no longer connected, part and parcel, with us, as humans. Rather, it is to be used by humans (Bouchilloux, 2003).

The harmful internalizations of colonial religion that require purging include 1) using religion as a strategy of domination and control over others, 2) the perspective that allows one to view themselves as superior and others as inferior, 3) patriarchy, 4) shame, and 5) individuation. When awareness is brought to these harmful colonial religious constructs, they can be purged from one's psyche.

Purging Colonial Land Boundaries

The meaning, origin, and significance of the land resides in the stories, songs, and prayers of the Native peoples and communities that belong to these lands. The land is a source of sustenance and abundance, but the cultural knowledge that comes from the land is also a form of wealth for Native peoples (p. 1303). Indigenous cultures came from Indigenous lands (Tsosie, 2000). The research data demonstrated that participants resisted the colonial reserve boundaries that cut them off from their culture and relations. Participants looked beyond the arbitrary colonial reserve lines to connect, support, and serve Indigenous people regardless of residence (i.e., on or off reserve).

Musto (1990) writes that "Indian reserves are the most visible reminder of the separation of Aboriginal people from the rest of Canada and other Canadians" (p. 105). Not only do reserves serve as a visible reminder of the separation of Aboriginal people from the rest of Canada, but they also represent a separation between Aboriginal people. From the creation of reserves onward, Indigenous people have been known as living on- or off-reserve. While reserve lines are arbitrary, in terms of geography, for those who belong to an Indigenous community, the reserve lines mean real-life impacts (Cannon, 2007), including resources, support, and rights.

While a multitude of inequities and barriers still exist between on- and off-reserve people, such as health disparities (Musto, 1990), or access to services and types of services (FNHA, 2024), changes are also underway. FNHA is initiating a discussion with a new sub-group population called *urban and away-from-home*, to support access to both FNHA and mainstream and urban Indigenous services:

> The majority of First Nations people in BC live in urban areas or away from home. However, mainstream health services are not always accessible due to systemic, institutional, clinical and individual barriers. The FNHA has multiple roles as a service provider, funder, partner and advocate to support the health and wellness of all First Nations people in BC, regardless of where they live or access their health services (para 1).

It appears that the ongoing advocacy of Indigenous people, such as the participants in this research, is being heard. Indigenous people cannot and should not be held and defined by reserve boundaries created by colonization but rather by the land and the ways in which the Indigenous people related to it. As Grande et al. (2015) explain, "Ultimately, Indigenous communities are

not defined by reservation borders but refer to all the places where people gather to sustain cultural integrity … By encouraging people to examine their own connections to revisit stories and histories, they learn to 'walk with' rather than over" (p. 119).

Purging Colonial Indigenous Group Identity

> You are Indian or White or you simply had no name for yourself.
>
> Lawrence (2004), *"Real" Indians and others.*

On the topic of group identity, Participant J reflected earlier; "My own Indigenous community discriminates on me as well because I am of mixed blood. Right? So, sometimes a person isn't Indian enough." Participants brought up the problematic issue of the criteria to describe being Indigenous, and within the category, *Indigenous* can be status Indian, non-status, Métis, and Inuit. These colonial creations of the Indigenous category that masquerades as "identity" are criticized by the participants, who intrinsically know they are damaging to Indigenous people and are not a reflection of one's Indigeneity. According to research, if the current system is maintained to determine who is Indian and who is not, Clatworthy (2003) illustrates that, within two generations, the majority of children born into First Nations families will not qualify to be status Indians, and within four generations, even fewer will qualify. The racial and colonially created Indigenous person, by definition of the federal government, will not exist. This is what the participants alluded to—extinction of the registered Indian population.

Participants challenged the current systems of Indigenous determination, such as Indian Status cards, to measure the so-called "blood quantum" of Indigenousness of a person. Lawrence (2004) states that Indigenous colonialism created identity, and the essentialist ideology is created

and maintained by those who set the terms; in this case, the federal government in Canada. Lawrence (2004) notes that:

> What is unspoken in regard to what makes someone Indigenous is who sets the terms. Currently, it has been the government who has the authority to determine Indigenous identity and authenticity … Aboriginal peoples did not play a part in creating the "racial" category Indian, but policy has had the effect of institutionalizing the category as a system of relations among Status Indians in Canada … The *Indian Act* has been just as concerned with constructing the legal category "Indian" as it has been on getting rid of Status Indians. Legal assimilation must, therefore, refer to the process of becoming a Non-Status Indian—whether an Aboriginal person is made aware of it or not. Legal assimilation was one of the motivations behind the enfranchisement policy (p. 6).

That needs to change. Indian status has its roots in the 1857 Act, when Indigenous people, for the first time, were forced into "involuntary enfranchisement" (Cannon, 2007, p. 35). According to Cannon (2007), "The government assumed control over the determination of who was an Indian … The *Indian Act* … is much more than a body of laws that for over a century has controlled every aspect of status Indian life" (p. 25).

While there is resistance, it is unknown what would take the place of the current colonial system for Indigenous determination, and there is certainly hesitancy. Giokas (1995) calls this the "paradox of protective assimilation," noting that "It has led to a corresponding paradox on the Indian side of the equation in the form of an overall attitude of ambivalence towards the protective paternalism implied by the historic federal role" (p. 2).

More contemporary research is coming out to offer solutions once the colonial definition of Indigenous is purged. Contemporary self-determined and defined Indigeneity is a relatively new study area with more questions than answers. Lawrence (2004) suggests a "postcolonial refashioning of Indigenous identity that is truer to Indigenous histories and cultures than those identities shaped by colonial realities that continue to surround Native people at present" (p. 22).

Purging Internalized Colonization

The domain of internalized colonization is not positioned under the domain of culture, because the domain and subsequent themes pivots from focusing on the external to addressing the internal impact on the individual person. The colonial sociocultural environment is the external container that becomes absorbed and has unquestionable harmful impact to the individual (Griffin, 1997). From this research, internalized colonization is understood as the individual's absorption of the colonial oppressor's poisons and then blaming oneself for feeling ill. As Participant J previously shared, she internalized racism and oppression because Indigenous people were perceived as lazy and less intelligent, and, if they succeeded, they were not taken seriously.

In research, internalized oppression, akin to internalized colonization, is when the oppressed have ''adopted the [dominant] group's ideology and accept their subordinate status as deserved, natural, and inevitable" (Griffin, 1997, p. 76). Lewis et al. (2014) researched oppression within the Alaskan Native context. They define internalized oppression as a "turning upon ourselves, upon our families, and upon our own people the distress patterns that result from the racism and oppression of the majority society" (Lipsky, 1977, as cited in Lewis et al., 2014, p. 6). Further, individuals can unknowingly embrace negative stereotypes and attune their

behaviour to such stereotypes that feed and reinforce the notion of one's inferiority (Lewis et al., 2014). Within this section on internalized colonization will be found themes that align with the constructs of internalized oppression; these need to be purged, including one's colonized identity, shame, conditioned helplessness, and colonial coping behaviour.

Purging Colonial Personal Identity

The data from the research suggests that healing requires Indigenous people to rid themselves of the harmful identities they internalized, and affirms that, for much of their life, the identities ascribed to them were left unquestioned and absorbed as truth of their soul. Participant A explained this as "recognizing that we're wounded not because of ourselves or our families. It's the government."

The harmful identities were part of the alchemy of colonization and another potion of a myriad of colonial poisons. The poisonous colonial identities fit with the common stereotypes offered by colonization. Furthermore, not only are the harmful stereotypes absorbed, but even when a Native identity is offered, it will be rejected because of internalized colonization. Weaver (2001) writes that "a climate filled with discrimination may lead an individual to reject a Native identity" (p. 244). Often, the Indigenous identity offering is an unrealistic paradox. As Fagon (2004) points out, "Aboriginal people are presented as either traditional nationalists or assimilated sellouts. For most Aboriginal people, I would suggest, the issue is not so black and white" (p. 25).

Stereotypes are dangerous and often conflated with reality and truth. The qualities of an individual become associated with and tethered to a racial or ethnic group; within Indigenous stereotype research, Indigenous is synonymous with "Native" and "Indian" (Fleming, 2006, p.

216). Within the Indigenous racial group, the stereotypes are rampant. The old "Indian" stereotypes are maintained, and new ones are born. Galloway (1986) names the common stereotypes in the work, *The Indian princess or Indian squaw: The stereotype lives on*. Galloway (1986) is correct; not only do the original old stereotypes from decades ago remain, but new stereotypes are being created.

Fleming (2006) identifies common stereotypes, as follows:

1) The drunk Native, the destiny of most Natives.

2) The spiritual Indian; the idea that Indigenous people are ultra-spiritual. While this can be perceived as a positive stereotype, it is still harmful, as many Indigenous people have not had the opportunity to learn or access Indigenous Spirit and spirituality, so one is left feeling like an inadequate "Indian." In addition, this idea collapses the rich uniqueness of Indigenous spirituality, beliefs, and practices into one romanticized idea.

3) Native people are "cultural." Again, it is potentially positive, but nonetheless harmful. Native people do not intuitively know their culture and history; children are just born with an innate cultural Wisdom, and one needs access to learn and experience it.

4) Natives as *super-citizens* who get free handouts and inequitable benefits from the government.

5) The "lazy Indian"; the perspective that Native people are lazy and do not want to work but rather collect welfare checks.

6) The reserve Indian lives on the reserve because they are "stuck" and cannot succeed in the "real world."

Participant L exemplified, sadly, the first stereotype; "[This is reflected in] my background and who I was as an Indigenous person. I was ashamed of who I was, and I didn't know who I was as Secwepemc, I thought I was supposed to be a drunk."

More recent stereotypes include 1) the "casino Indian," "which articulates … both racist and classist discourses [and] reflects the fear of Native Americans as an economic and political threat," and 2) the "ignoble savage," reinvented in a contemporary context, who poses a threat of violence, including protesting and promoting land and environmental rights (Lacroix, 2011, p. 1). As the literature and this research's data demonstrate, part of healing is addressing the Native stereotypes that may be absorbed. There is a plethora of Native stereotypes that must be investigated within oneself so one can see what one may have absorbed, and purge what is not true to one's Indigenous Spirit.

Purging Colonial Shame

Shame is a deeply-rooted colonial view of humans going back thousands of years and has been used as a perspective on humans in the bible, the evolutionary works of Darwin (1859), philosophy (Hobbes, 1947), and literary works (Golding, 1954), which have all maintained the proposition of innate human badness, which is shame. As Brown (2012) writes, "Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging" (p. 69). And, as Participant L pointed out, "You have to learn that we [Indigenous people] learned to hate ourselves, and that isn't true; I had to get rid of that belief."

Contemporary research on the impacts of colonization on Indigenous people notes the outcome of shame which must be purged through decolonization and healing. As Marshall (2006) articulates, "decolonizing meant rejecting the shame and self-loathing endemic to

colonized people" (p. 187). Colonization poisoned individuals' "bodies and souls" (Marshall, 2006, p. 187), and the concept of self was replaced with shame. Marshall's (2006) research explains the impacts of colonization and the outcome of shame for Hawaiians, which would likely be similar across colonized Indigenous groups:

> Colonialism was a deadly experience for Hawaiians, and the damage and dispossession of colonialism continued to ramify as shame in the bodies and souls of Hawaiians in the late 20th century … Feelings of shame about being Hawaiian were thought to ramify in families and across generations and were supported by mainstream discourses, which portrayed Hawaiian neighborhoods as crime-infested areas filled with single mothers on welfare. The cultural revitalization movement attempted to deal with these existential and discursive issues by treating shame as a source of ill-being (p. 188).

Marshall's (2006) treatment of shame "as a source of ill-being" (p. 188) suggests that shame makes individuals sick and acts as a colonial poison. Therefore, it must be purged.

Purging Conditioned Helplessness

Miller and Seligman (1975) demonstrate, through their work with dogs, that learned helplessness occurs when there is no control of a negative outcome. In their experiment, dogs were given electric shocks and there was no predictability of shocks, regardless of the dogs' behaviour. The dogs became numb, tuned out, depressed, and unmotivated. Just as the dogs learned to be helpless and victims of the unpredictable shock, people also became conditioned:

> The learned helplessness phenomenon is proposed as a model for the emotional numbing and maladaptive passivity sometimes following victimization. Victims may learn during the victimization episode that responding is futile. This learning is represented as an

> expectation of future response-outcome independence (helplessness). Causal interpretations of the episode affect the chronicity and generality of deficits resulting from this expectation, as well as the involvement of self-esteem loss (Peterson & Seligman, 1983, p. 103).

It is important to note that learned helplessness is conditioned. According to Peterson and Seligman (1983), it is a psychological response and coping mechanism to adverse stimuli and is not a conscious or voluntary process. Learned helplessness occurs when one cannot control the cause of suffering, stop it or escape it (Peterson & Seligman, 1983). It is an outcome of one's experience in one's environment. Thomas (1986) and Hicks (2004) both investigate learned helplessness relating specifically to one's racial or identity group. Thomas (1986) explains:

> Members of ethnic minority groups experience uncontrollability more than do members of the majority culture. Therefore, they exhibit the deficits associated with learned helplessness, which include inhibition of behavioral responses, cognitive deficits (negative expectancies), lowered self-esteem and depressed mood (p. 378).

Research has named the socio-cultural context, including racism, as leading to learned helplessness. Racism causes issues which are chronic and acculturative; the individuals who belong to the marginalized race have little to no control over their suffering and experience chronic exposure and violations as a result of their race (Clark, 1965; Hicks, 2004). Hicks (2004) affirms that "The repeated exposure to lack of control over the outcomes of life situations, or behaviour-outcome non-contingency, has been consistently demonstrated within the literature to result in increased susceptibility to learned helplessness deficits" (p. 4).

Indigenous people could not—and still cannot—control, stop, escape, or even predict the extent of colonization and the resultant suffering. Therefore, learned helplessness is a natural, predictable outcome of colonization that one learns early on, and even generationally (Beard, 2019), which must be purged to get back to a pre-colonial state of inherent self, family, and Nation-based determination. This concept is illustrated by the idea that Indigenous language is rooted in self-determination, the opposite of learned helplessness; "According to both Alfred (1999) and another Kanien'kehaka writer, Patricia Monture-Angus, the closest equivalent is the word *tewatatha:wi*, meaning 'we carry ourselves,' or, according to another translation, 'We take care of ourselves.'" (Fagon, 2004, p. 19).

Purging Colonial Coping

Colonial coping emerged as a theme as a strategy used to cope with colonial trauma, and often, these survival strategies maintain one's survival in the face of colonization until one can heal. Participant L noted that he started doing drugs at the age of eleven to escape who he was, as an Indigenous person.

Gabor Maté is well known for being one of the champions who shed light on addictions as a coping and survival mechanism in the face of trauma. As a physician who worked on the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver, he noted that not every individual who was traumatized experienced addictions, but that every "addict" had experienced significant life traumas (Maté, 2010).

Colonial coping is how people deal with colonial trauma that would not have been a condition prior to colonization; it is a coping strategy that is a by-product of colonization. Repetitive coping behaviours that are problematic and compulsive and that provide soothing to

an individual's suffering because of trauma fall into the category of *escapism* (Dimitrova-Georgieva, 2023). Escapism provides solace for individuals suffering from traumas. The behaviours can be wide-ranging, including so-called "addictions" without substance (also called behavioural addiction) such as gambling, cyber addiction, addiction to sex, work addiction, and addiction to shopping, to name a few. Semaille (2009) addresses this coping behaviour:

> Escapism … is described by the unwillingness to experience negative emotions due to compromised psychological resilience, subsequently resulting in specific behaviours to achieve the desired diversion … Escapism can present itself in several ways, however, individuals mostly engage in repetitive behaviours, which consistently bring them solace, i.e., using a physical agent (the drug) to elicit a perceived escape from reality (p. 335).

According to Dimitrova-Georgieva (2023), "Georgsdóttir et al. (2021) examined the direct correlation between childhood emotional trauma and addictive behaviours … drug addictions help subdue thoughts and feelings and reduce anxious tendencies towards the traumatic experiences" (p. 8). For healing, this research embraces the perspective that colonial coping must be purged, in order to re-engage with one's feeling they are escaping, and to provide care for the emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical wounds of colonial trauma.

Purging Colonized Masculinity

> When the Seventh Cavalry invaded our communities [in the late 1800s], our people were appalled with their behaviour. They were drinking and swearing and being violent toward our women. This was totally foreign to us. The turning point for me was when I realized that I had become a Seventh Calvary man, and that I had to relearn how to become a Lakota man.

Marlin Mousseau, October 19, 2010 (in Anderson et al., 2012, p. 267).

Indigenous masculinity was poisoned, and the impacts are generational; "Indigenous masculinities have been profoundly impacted by colonization and the imposition of White supremacist heteronormative patriarchy that has left a negative legacy for Indigenous women, children, Elders, men, and their communities as a whole" (Innes & Anderson, 2015, p. 4). Pre-colonial research holds up Indigenous masculinity with the vision of reclamation for healing and wellness. Gender relations, pre-contact, were situated on a foundation of equality, balance, harmony, and respect (Innes et al., 2012). In the place of Indigenous masculinity was the internalization of colonial masculinity through violent oppressive strategies (Anderson et al., 2012; Smith, 2005). Colonial masculinities were a tool used by the colonizer to violently control and replace distinctive gender systems and break down kinship among Indigenous peoples with patriarchal, gender-ordered, dominance-based systems (Anderson et al., 2012; Smith, 2005).

Without imposing the colonial hierarchies like patriarchy, there was no way to easily indoctrinate Indigenous people into a system of inherent imbalance that ran against their worldview. Colonizers understood the strategy to domination was through changing and targeting men and their roles, and redefining their masculinity (Smith, 2005). Colonial masculinity was deliberately created to serve as a tool first enacted by the colonizer onto Indigenous people and then, Indigenous people onto themselves, as an outcome of internalized colonization and trauma. Morgensen (2015) documents this, noting that "European settler states have helped craft 'traditional' Indigenous masculinities that functioned strategically through complicity with and assimilation into forms of invader masculinity" (p. 38). Colonial masculinity was absorbed by many Indigenous men like poison, and that must be purged in healing.

With colonial masculinity purged in healing, Indigenous masculinity is being, and continues to be, reconnected with, re-envisioned, and regenerated by reconnecting to Indigenous creation, original knowledge, and Spirit (Antone, 2015). The strengths and wellness within traditional Indigenous masculinity can be brought to life in contemporary ways. Indigenous masculinity research is relatively new. Anderson et al. (2012) offer a closing statement that summarizes the direction forward for the Spirit within Indigenous masculinity and hope:

> Indigenous men can foster non-violent, non-dominant identities in themselves and others. This requires exploration of traditional, non-patriarchal roles and responsibilities … As a starting place, the stories from Elders can help us to conceptualize what it means to "protect" and "provide" in non-patriarchal ways, and to think about how these responsibilities can be translated into the modern world and the increasingly urbanized Indigenous populations. They allow us to see how Indigenous men have always had a role in protecting and providing for life, all life. It is no small affair to be charged with "protecting the Medicine" or "carrying the bones of our Ancestors," and men were traditionally honoured for these sacred responsibilities. The Elders remind us that they were also nurtured and mentored to do so. Moving forward, we can reflect on how to provide similar nurturing environments for our boys and men. If we do, notions such as "protecting" and "providing" will take modern forms; forms that Indigenous men will articulate and act on as they heal and decolonize from the violence of patriarchy (p. 280).

Purging Harmful Colonized Relations

Both groups, wellness experts and wellness role models, purged harmful relationships. For healing, it is necessary that one's harmful relations are purged from one's life. These

relations are harmful because they exhibit certain colonized behaviours, which, in popular literature, are similar to lateral violence (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011; Smith, 1999). Colonized behaviour is an outcome of oppression; those who are oppressed identify with and, as a result, can replicate the actions and behaviours of the oppressor, the colonizer (Fanon, 1963; Freire, 2007); therefore, the behaviour is colonial behaviour. Such behaviours emerged from the assimilation of colonization within the colonial sociocultural context where colonial violence behaviours were experienced and learned (Smith, 1999).

Ongoing colonization meant that many generations lived in unsafe environments, which required that individuals live in a state of survival. Living in a prolonged survival state brings about survival behaviours (i.e., aggression), and coping behaviours (i.e., substance use). Violence and aggression can be mental, emotional, physical, or spiritual in nature (Smith, 1999). Removing (or purging), relationships with people who perpetuate colonial violent behaviour and instilling personal boundaries is necessary for healing and wellness. It is imperative to keep oneself safe and separate from relations who do not yet act in ways that accord with wellness.

Research suggests that one's social networks and those with whom one is in relation directly impact and influence personal wellness. From a trauma perspective, Maté (2022) asserts that one will always choose a partner—this extends beyond romantic relationships into platonic relationships and family—with whom they have equal trauma; as one works on personal healing, the behaviour that was once tolerated will appear harmful and dysfunctional and will no longer align with the person engaged in healing. The person engaged in healing has two options; revert to the behaviours and patterns that are accepted and normalized to maintain the relationship, or separate from the relationship until their partner also engages in healing in a positive, well-

adjusted relationship. Participants in this research avowed that the second option is required, with the hope that the individuals heal, but also with an understanding that they may not. This means they must go forward without that relation, and with no judgement or shame placed onto the individual they must separate from. As Participant J pointed out, many people have their own colonial trauma which, when not healed, harms others. Boundaries are needed, she feels, to avoid absorbing their violence.

Phase Two: Purging Colonization Implications

The significance of this phase is that colonization acts like a poison on Indigenous people; like most poisons, it must be purged, thereby cleansing oneself. The poison depresses the Indigenous person's connection to self, Spirit, relations, and culture, elements which, together, promote healing and wellness. To depress means to "push down"; oneself, one's relations, culture, and Spirit have always been there, just poisoned and pushed down, waiting to be purged, so they can be reclaimed.

For healing, the data suggest that, before reclamation can happen, addressing the impacts of colonization must occur. There appears to be a movement to reclaim across Canada; for example, the FNHA Gathering Wisdom conference theme in 2024 was *reclaim*. However, I have come to understand that, in jumping to reclaim, as I tried to do with this research, a person can miss the essential healing opportunity of addressing internalized colonization, colonized culture, and colonized relations. There is a natural human tendency to avoid the discomfort and pain. It makes sense that there is avoidance of confronting the impacts of colonization, which this phase does, head-on. The data exposed the fact that, without delving into the depths of one's personal sphere, family, and community and the Indigenous organizations—and, systemically, the ways in

which colonization has become twisted in the fabric of each sphere—healing and living in cultural wellness, guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity, will be very challenging, if not impossible.

The more unfortunate impact of skipping over the phase of purging colonization, to be able to engage in reclamation the next phase of healing, is that one could potentially negate or greatly limit their healing. Purging is addressing the core wound; if all one does is reclaim without healing the core wounds, they are just addressing the symptoms and compounding the wound with glitter on top. Skipping the purge phase is like trying to fix a broken bone with aspirin instead of healing the bone, first.

Phase Three: Reclaiming Cultural Wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity

Reclaiming cultural wellness is fundamentally colonial trauma healing, reclaiming what was poisoned by colonization, culture, relational wellness, and personal wellness. Braided together, healing is holistic and aligns with the trauma-healing philosophy that trauma healing is fundamentally about reconnection (Maté, 2008). Within this context, reconnection is akin to reclaiming. Within the Indigenous and colonial context, the reclamation extends beyond oneself to reclaim one's culture, relations, and one's Indigenous Spirit; the Spirit of Indigeneity. Lastly, it is important to bring emphasis on the Spirit of reclamation, and, by *Spirit*, I mean the intention by which one engages. It is not necessarily the specific cultural practice, protocol, or word in a distinct Indigenous language; neither is it one's literal relations, but, rather, it is the Spirit of those things themselves which fulfills the traditional gifts that those things provided our Ancestors and that give those same gifts and benefits to Indigenous people now.

One of the most important insights that emerged, for me, from this exploratory research was that colonial trauma healing comprises three intersecting domains of reclamation; cultural,

personal, and relational, with the Spirit at their core. This is a theme that Lavallee & Poole (2010) uncover; "Sickness begins with the spirit, if the spirit is wounded—because of the principle of interconnectedness—the mind, emotions and body become sick. Colonization has wounded the spirit of Indigenous peoples and this is one of the reasons for ill health amongst Indigenous people globally" (p. 274). Reclaiming one's culture and personal and relational wellness simultaneously heals the Spirit of Indigeneity. The data are unique in the research because of the specificity of the ways that the participants shared. It was striking to me, the efforts they must make, and the ingenuity that Indigenous people must have, to reclaim wellness and their Spirit of Indigeneity, while being embedded within a challenging sociocultural environment of modern colonialism. This section lays out, in detail, the specific examples of the participants' reclamations across the three domains; cultural, relational and personal.

The literature recognizes that Indigenous healing is Spirit healing named here as "Spirit reclamation" or, as Isaacson et al. (2022) refer to it, "calling them back," in the case of healing for Indigenous patients who were cancer survivors. This research generated attention to healing the Spirit within the contemporary colonial context. This study suggests that Spirit healing can only occur after the colonial poison has been removed and purged.

Reclaiming cultural wellness and reconnecting to the Indigenous Spirit through the personal, relational and cultural aspects of one's life, is not necessarily a new phenomenon in Indigenous healing literature and mainstream discourse. For example, Duran (2006) asserts that Indigenous healing is reclaiming culture and healing one's "soul wound." One's soul is inseparable from, and potentially the same as, one's Spirit. As Duran et al. (1998) observe:

> It was almost two decades ago that the authors became aware of the concept of a "soul wound," although knowledge of what is characterized as the "soul wound" had been an integral part of Indigenous knowledge ever since Columbus landed in this hemisphere and Cortez arrived in Vera Cruz, Mexico. Native people who were asked about problems in the contemporary Native community explained that present problems had their etiology in the traumatic events known as the "soul wound." Current synonymous terms include "historical trauma" (p. 341).

The study of the combined commentaries of wellness experts and wellness models generated the prospect of an expanded approach in the contemporary colonial context of Indigenous healing of one's "soul wound" by making a distinction that healing is seen in this model as reclaiming cultural wellness within three strands; cultural, personal, and relational. One of the most recent scholars in Indigenous trauma healing noted similar findings. Bookman-Zandler and Smith (2024) address the elements of community and family (i.e., relational), individual (i.e., personal), and traditional practices (i.e., cultural):

> Community is a critical component of trauma recovery. No one can heal in isolation. The importance of community in understanding one's identity, understanding one's experience of past trauma … Traditional spiritual practices, the exercise of sovereignty, and participation in the communal grieving process are essential to identity recovery and restoration from family of origin trauma. The wounds of the individual and the community are interwoven, and one cannot be addressed to the neglect of the other (p. 194).

When the three domains are seen as strands of wellness and are woven together, this allows for the reclamation of one's Indigenous Spirit.

Reclaiming Culture

What became evident from the data is that culture is imperative for healing and wellness. Wilson (2004) finds that the reclamation of Indigenous cultural values, teachings, and knowledge supports the development of a positive cultural identity, which leads to improved wellness. The common anecdotal phrase, *culture is our Medicine*, is mentioned regularly in the health and wellness field, but it has Indigenous philosophical and scientific backing. From an Indigenous perspective, Indigenous culture is essential to wellness. To know one's culture and live one's culture provides the gifts of wellness (FNHA, 2017; Thira, 2013). From the perspective of Lavallee and Poole (2010):

> If one recognizes that the assault on cultural identity has played a significant role on the ill health of Indigenous people and that the spirit has been wounded, then healing activities need to include rebuilding the individual and collective [cultural] identity of Indigenous peoples. This includes a spiritual understanding of the individual and collective Indigenous culture (p. 275).

The reclamation of culture within the contemporary colonial context is relatively abstract and can be interpreted in a number of ways. This exploratory research offers some insights and examples contributing to the meaning of the common phrase, culture is healing. The data provide specific examples that illuminate the abstract phrase within this contemporary colonial context. This research brought forward necessary contextualization about the culture that necessarily adds clarity to the common wisdom of culture as healing or that culture is our Medicine.

The literature distinguished two types of culture; big-C culture and little-c culture. Big-C culture is also referred to as “high” culture. It includes the overarching belief system, and the values, morals, and principles that inspire individual and collective behaviour that is rooted in language, traditions, and history that transcend generations (Kovács, 2017; Kramsch, 1993). Big C culture was originally created to define the types of culture for teaching language and cultural classes; however, it can be useful for Indigenous cultural discourse, as Indigenous culture, in itself, is being reclaimed and re-learned. Kovács (2017) writes:

> Big C culture is a humanistic concept … and it is, in fact, the result of the study of literature and arts, taught in schools. If, together with the target language, we also teach about the history, literature, arts, and institutions of the respective community, the language will be embedded into “the reassuring continuity of a national community that gives it meaning and value” (p. 76).

Big C culture is the history, traditions, art, and systems that provide the framework for collective organization and inspire individual action. Big C culture appears to align with the systemic and holistic definitions of culture that align with the Spirit of culture, affiliated most closely with what the study participants expressed. Hofstede (1994) puts it succinctly; “Culture is the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p. 5). To make this definition more aligned with the exploratory data big C culture is the collective programming of the Indigenous Spirit and mind.

Little c culture is the micro-expressions of big C culture; the everyday practices and norms. It is the subtle elements of one’s life (Kramsch, 1993). Kovács (2017) notes that “little c culture focuses mainly on everyday life, on social interaction and communication, including

behaviour, beliefs, values, eating, dwelling, and talking habits" (p. 76). Kramsch (1993) contends that little c culture is unique to each individual but is held together and inspired by big C culture. Little c culture, according to Kramsch (1993), is a unique expression in everyday big C culture:

> Even though everyday cultural practices are as varied as a native speaker's use of language in everyday life, the focus is on the typical, sometimes stereotypical, behaviours, foods, celebrations and customs of the dominant group or of that group of native speakers that is the most salient to foreign eyes (p. 66).

From Spencer-Oatey's (2008) perspective:

> Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the meaning of other people's behavior (p. 3).

This conceptualization embraces the common strands within culture but makes room for individual expression, little c culture, and the meaning attached to individuals' actions and behaviours in which one determines if they are living "culturally" in big C culture.

The data made it apparent that there was a conflict in the understanding of culture. There was a paradox, where some participants said culture was necessary, and other participants said they did not engage in the stereotypical culture and that their lives looked like any other life. The unifying strand that led to further investigation into what culture is and the layers of culture was the paradox of culture. What all participants agreed on was that their life was inspired by what they considered to be Indigenous values, principles, and ways of being. It was the Spirit in which they engaged with life that determined whether one lived in cultural wellness; not whether or not

they engaged with little c cultures, such as a cultural practice or artifacts. As Participant O shared, “If anyone was to observe my life, it doesn’t look any different than any other person’s, necessarily, but it is the intention with how I live my life that makes it Indigenous.” Participant J explained:

> It’s the underlying values and Indigenous values that are different than the Western that will determine if it is wellness-promoting; [if] it is Indigenous or if it does not promote wellness, it’s probably colonized culture—so it’s the values underlying that determine wellness.

Participant T suggested that living the Seven Values leads to Indigenous wellness:

> I learned about the Seven Values … As I practiced them, the way I walked, the way I talked, and the way I thought changed as I lived by the Seven Laws. I had to learn to introduce them into my life in the 21st century and apply them to how to deal with the issues that my Ancestors didn’t have. And it’s tough, but you can actually do it.

Evident in this research is the vital foundation of culture; the Spirit of Indigeneity. It is with the Spirit of Indigeneity that one engages with little c culture. Some participants engaged with cultural practices, like sweats and smudge, while others did not, but they still lived big C culture. The participants who did not engage with cultural practices still considered themselves—and were considered by the wellness expert who nominated them—to be living embodied Indigenous wellness. Therefore, it is not necessarily the engagement with traditional or cultural practices that lead to Indigenous wellness, but living Indigenous culture that makes culture as Medicine.

The results lend insight that it may not be the little c Indigenous cultural practice or artifact that is inherently healing, and determines is one is living in wellness, or a measure of Indigeneity. Little c culture is not a panacea, contrary to popular discourse. What appeared within the Indigenous healing, wellness and reclamation of Indigeneity was the participants' connections with the Spirit of Indigeneity in their life engagements, which were rooted in big C culture. At the same time, a lot of little c culture is stolen to an unknown extent and specific practices may not be able to be reclaimed but that does not mean that culture and Indigenous wellness cannot be. Big C culture is resilient. It has shown, throughout this dissertation, its ability to be reclaimed and to be lived in the contemporary colonial context with the adaptation of the "traditional" Wisdom, values, principles, and philosophies woven with contemporary wellness values and principles that have emerged within this new era. Participants demonstrated how they have breathed life back into culture by living it.

Culture as a Living Process

With the purging of colonization and colonized culture comes the reclamation of Indigenous culture and the Spirit of Indigeneity. With colonial poison addressed, the Spirit of Indigeneity and Indigenous culture are awakened, re-initiating the evolutionary process of Indigenous culture.

Colonization caused insurmountable injury to Indigenous culture, as Kortright (2003) points out, "The colonizing power alters, basically, or destroys Indigenous culture" (p. 3) and therefore, cultural evolution. According to Fast and Colllin-Vézina (2010), "First Nations people have been traumatized by racism and attacks on their culture" (p. 63), which goes hand-in-hand with forced assimilation. They note, further, that "Assimilation was the goal … in the attempt to

colonize First Nation peoples" (Fast & Collin-Vézina, 2010, p. 69). Indigenous culture was replaced by colonial culture, and the imposed colonial cultural that was injected began its own evolution, as culture is nurtured and maintained socially. Halloran (2004) affirms that:

> Cultural knowledge and practices are dynamic phenomena; collectively maintained and transformed by societal members over time and space. Cultural maintenance, transmission, and transformation are the result of ongoing interaction of people engaged in shared activities in concrete situations (p. 3).

Colonial culture has been the dominant culture from the inception of forced assimilation. A research participant in Halloran's (2004) work states that, "Because the colonization has really done a number on us, it's hard to undo the mind-set" (p. 2). The Indigenous cultural evolution that was terminated with colonialism and was replaced by forced colonial assimilation is Indigenous cultural trauma. From Halloran's (2004) perspective:

> Altogether, the contemporary and historical interventions into Aboriginal life have been argued to represent a form of cultural genocide. At the very least, I argue that the destruction of Aboriginal law, spirituality, social structure, and the possession of sacred lands (the central foundations of cultural lifeways) is a representative case for cultural trauma (p. 6).

However, the participants in this research demonstrated that, as with any trauma, cultural trauma can be healed; this takes place through the reclamation and reinstatement of Indigenous cultural evolution. For example, "some Indigenous communities are turning to cultural revitalization as a holistic community-driven response to suicide prevention and treatment" (Barker et al., 2017, p. e208). Reclaiming Indigenous cultural evolution is healing.

This research represents two distinct types of cultural evolution; 1) colonial cultural evolution, and 2) Indigenous cultural evolution. Cultural evolution is unstoppable; it is always happening, for better or for worse, but has been equated with progress (Junger, 2016). However, this research reveals that colonial cultural evolution poisoned and disrupted Indigenous cultural evolution, but that, with reclamation, the Indigenous cultural evolution is reignited. Cultural evolution occurs naturally and is a constant weaving of sociocultural, cultural, genetic, environmental, and behaviours, driven by the adaption through social learning. As Henrich and McElreath (2007) describe it:

> Cultural learning and cultural evolution arise from genetically evolved psychological adaptations for acquiring ideas, beliefs, values, practices, mental models, and strategies from other individuals by observation and inference … (cultural evolution) that operate by different transmission rules than genetic inheritance … Cultural evolution can alter both the social and physical environments faced by evolving genes, leading to a process termed culture-gene coevolution (p. 556).

One of the critiques of colonial cultural evolution is that it has been situated within a Western-biased paradigm of "progress" and "superiority" in relation to Indigenous cultures. Bastien et al. (2003) note that:

> "Cultural evolution" is a concept that has formed the philosophical basis for genocidal policies. Within this framework, Indigenous peoples are commonly seen as in need of development. The ideological rationale of colonization has been the presumed need to alter Indigenous people's lifeways to a way of life considered "civilized." Such civilization was to be achieved, first and foremost, through the process of Christianization

> … The notion of cultural evolution, the rationalization of necessary progress, perpetuates violence through psychological control (p. 30).

Literature within the Indigenous context recognizes cultural continuity, which illuminates the resilience of the aspects of Indigenous culture that persisted despite colonization (Auger, 2016). While cultural continuity has persisted in some regards, it is apparent and undeniable that colonization impacted cultural continuity and Indigenous cultural evolution. An examination of cultural evolution within the colonial Canadian environmental and sociocultural context, historically and currently, makes it clear that colonization interrupted Indigenous cultural continuity and evolution. Loppie et al. (2009) argue that, "Colonization disrupted cultural progress. Colonization changed the cultural trajectory of intergenerational cultural connectedness, which is maintained through intact families and the engagement of elders, who pass traditions to subsequent generations" (p. 18). Instead of Indigenous cultural evolving, it was poisoned by colonial cultural trauma.

Currently, this research suggests that, as participants purged colonization, they reclaimed culture and the Spirit of Indigeneity. While individuals cannot reengage with culture exactly as they did, pre-colonization, Indigenous people are resourceful and are reclaiming culture that is available and can be sought out. Furthermore, the Spirit of the culture can always be reclaimed; culture came from, and still does come from, the land (Kimmerer, 2013), and, as demonstrated by the participants, many Indigenous people are returning there to revitalize Indigenous culture. Tsosie (2000) reiterates that, "The land is a source of sustenance and abundance, but the cultural knowledge that comes from the land is also a form of 'wealth' for Native peoples" (p. 1303).

Participants in this research also exemplified the ways that they borrow aspects of culture from one another to piece back together what remains. Participant S shared, “I mean, I’ve had a bit of knowledge from home. But when I think of my own teachings, they’re kind of a mishmash, different cultural teachings and teachings from other Indigenous around the world.” This idea is echoed by Kirmayer et al. (2003), who affirm that “The last century saw the emergence of various forms of pan-Indian spirituality, in which practices associated with specific cultural groups have been widely adopted and served both as effective healing rituals for groups and as symbols of shared identity and affiliation” (p. 6).

The research participants demonstrated what cultural evolution looks like in contemporary colonial Canada. They illustrated the complex reality of integrating traditional culture with contemporary reflections to improve relevance.

Participants role-modelled picking up cultural fragments and disentangling colonized culture, unweaving “traditional” Indigenous culture from colonial poison. They courageously shared their experiences of seeking cultural teachings from other Indigenous cultures, Spiritual Traditions, and new age content that their vision aligns with what they know of Indigenous culture. Participants have disrupted colonial cultural trauma by reigniting Indigenous cultural evolution and cultural progress. They are champions, re-igniting Indigenous cultural evolution rooted in the Spirit of Indigeneity.

Reclaiming Access to Culture

While the data indicated that culture is one of the three core strands of wellness, a surprising theme emerged, that of access to culture. Some participants noted the barriers that exist for Indigenous people to access culture. It is troubling to note that a key domain within

Indigenous healing and wellness is culture, but yet, it is inaccessible to many. However, the research participants provided solutions that reflect the contemporary colonial context to improve access and by addressing problematic traditional protocols. In that vein, BCcampus (2018) also notes that:

> The term *protocol* includes many things, but overall, it refers to ways of interacting with Indigenous people in a manner that respects traditional ways of being. Protocols are not just "manners" or "rules"—they are a representation of a culture's deeply held ethical system. They also have highly practical applications that may have arisen in a pre-contact context but still apply today (para. 1).

The wellness experts, specifically, provided an Indigenous trauma-informed perspective that articulated the need to adjust cultural and traditional protocols. From Olson's (2018) viewpoint, an Indigenous trauma-informed approach recognizes the social historical impacts that "have disrupted … Indigenous life, and the revitalization of this worldview that naturally encompasses strategies of anti-oppression, non-interference, and client self-determination" (para 1). Without adjustments, cultural and traditional protocols can be a source of exclusion, shame, and judgement. Instead, Indigenous trauma-informed adaptations are necessary to reflect and align with Indigenous cultural values and embrace compassion and the historical and current contemporary colonial trauma context.

One perspective, reflected in the participants' responses, is that every Indigenous person alive must be celebrated. Their Ancestors have survived colonization so they can be here, and, in the face of colonization, they also continue to survive; they should be included and supported to access culture. Culture is not easy to access for many Indigenous people in this colonial context;

> it is a privilege for Indigenous people who do meet the "criteria," but is even less accessible for those who are struggling with the impacts of colonial trauma and are coping in ways that are stigmatized and judged. Historically and currently, privilege in research is associated with race, sexual orientation, social status, age, degrees of ableness, and religion (Black & Stone, 2005).

However, this research suggests that, within an Indigenous context, there is a social privilege that is linked to access to culture; therefore, there is an Indigenous cultural privilege that is not available to many Indigenous people.

Culture is a core strand of healing. Yet, those who are suffering the most, struggling with problematic coping to colonial trauma, are the ones who are often not included or who do not meet certain criteria to participate. Participants challenged this "traditional" protocol and queried shifting the "traditional" mindset and embracing one rooted in cultural wellness values. To further investigate this idea, a good starting place is with the definition of protocol, which, from the perspective of Anderson and Younging (2015), "provide guidelines for behaviour … One clear advantage of protocols is that they can be flexible and adaptable to specific contexts and local interests. This makes them ideal tools for guidance on appropriate and/or ethical behaviour and practice" (p. 181).

Let us suppose that protocols are about behaviour and that they can be flexible and reflect a contemporary sociocultural context. In that case, there is potentially room for adaptation to meet Indigenous peoples' needs for healing and access to culture, while preserving the integrity of cultural and traditional ceremonies. The protocol focus could be on the ability and capacity for safe and appropriate behaviour during the cultural ceremony and less on the judgement on how a

person is coping with colonial trauma outside of the ceremony or cultural practice (i.e., are they able to behave in a way that preserves the integrity, purpose, and intention of the cultural practice?)

There appears to have been unanimous agreement among the participants in this study that the colonial trauma context needs to be considered, withholding judgement on the ways individuals are living in order to cope with colonial traumas from a trauma-informed practice perspective. This is reflected by Elliott et al. (2005), who note that "Trauma-informed services are those in which service delivery is influenced by an understanding of the impact of interpersonal violence and victimization on an individual's life and development" (p. 464). This research adds the contextual layer that victimization and violence are rooted in colonization. There is consistent alignment with the trauma-informed principles and the participants' advocacy for acceptance, inclusion, and no judgement in culture. The principles outlined by Elliott et al. (2005) are also echoed in the current research study. Elliott et al. (2005) suggest that "trauma-informed services recognize the impact of violence and victimization on development and coping strategies" (p. 465). The participants in this research articulated a similar message, that Indigenous people are struggling with colonial trauma and that excluding them from culture is not the answer; rather, the solution is inclusion. A further principle articulated by Elliott et al. (2005) is that "trauma-informed services identify recovery from trauma as a primary goal" (p. 465). In this study, all the participants agreed that healing colonial trauma is the baseline goal; access to culture is vital to accomplish this. Elliott et al. (2005) suggest that "trauma-informed services create an atmosphere that is respectful of survivors' need for safety, respect, and acceptance" (p. 467). Again, this trauma-informed principle is in alignment with the present

research study. Indigenous people need acceptance and safety for healing, not exclusion, judgement, or shame. A further principle is that "trauma-informed services emphasize strengths, highlighting adaptations over symptoms and resilience over pathology" (Elliott et al., 2005, p. 467). This principle is the most significant of them all; it embraces a strength-based, resilient perspective, often cited as "cultural" (Young, 2015), and views trauma as an adaption that has been acquired to maintain survival from suffering:

> Trauma-informed practice recognizes symptoms as originating from adaptations to the traumatic event or context … Validating resilience is important even when past adaptations and ways of coping are now causing problems. Understanding a symptom as an adaptation reduces the client's guilt and shame, increases her self-esteem, and provides a guideline for developing new skills and resources to allow new and better adaptations to the current situation. Another commonly missed strength is the person's capacity to serve in valued social roles. Someone may have many problems and yet function well as a mother, employee, neighbourhood organizer, and so on. Emphasizing the recovery process, the skills associated with her social roles increases the woman's perception of her own resources and feelings of hope (Elliott et al., 2005, p. 467).

The participants provided context that situated Indigenous people coping in often-stigmatized ways (i.e., addiction), as a natural adaptation or response to horrific suffering. Rather than judgement, Indigenous people need acknowledgment of their survival and inclusion in culture, so they can heal and reclaim the Indigenous culture, which will offer them a way forward to live in cultural wellness with better more effective ways to cope with the colonial trauma and suffering.

Reclaiming Cultural Values

In this study's literature review, *values* were listed as one of the core theoretical frameworks, and what was written holds true to this data. Values were highlighted numerous times and were seen in both Indigenous literature (Benton-Banai, 1988; Mehl-Madrona, 2003; Restoule, 2004; Restoule, 2008) and Western literature (Bardi and Schwartz, 2003; Schwartz, 1997). The models included highlighting values as a core aspect of wellness, included the FNHA model of wellness (2021), the CIWW model (Thira 2021), and SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2022). All these theories assert that values guide one's life. Furthermore, the CIWW, put forward by Thira (2021) has a message that is synonymous with the suggested findings of this research. Thira (2021) explains that, at its core, Indigenous wellness in contemporary Canada can be reclaimed by living by traditional cultural values in a contemporary context:

> Wellness is a gift we receive from living our values—everything else flows from there. Wellness is more than psychology; it is culture because wellness gifts are cultural gifts. The values identified as the foundation of wellness are traditional values so living in wellness is living culturally. This means that living cultural values is the cure for the social and historical disease that is colonization (p. 84).

The participants provided cultural values with which they strived to align, to guide their lives and to achieve cultural wellness in today's world. Similarly, Malloch (1989) argues that "It is very important that we return to our Indian values to guide us in rebuilding our health" (p. 110). More recently, in scholarly work, cultural values have come up again as an essential component of Indigenous health. Colomeda and Wenzel (2000) contend that, "[for] Indigenous peoples, good health includes … applying the wisdom of the Elders, learning the songs, beliefs,

healing practices, and values that have been handed down in the community from generation to generation" (p. 247).

It is evident, then, that cultural values are foundational to cultural wellness. What is significant in this theme is theory and practice coming together as praxis. The theoretical Wisdom that cultural values are essential is presented with contemporary lived examples by the participants and supported by research, grounding the abstract in reality.

Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) suggest that, "according to the literature, values are (a) concepts or beliefs, (b) about desirable end states or behaviours, (c) that transcend specific situations, (d) guide selection or evaluation of behaviour and events, and (e) are ordered by relative importance" (p. 551). The added specificity on values offered by Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) provides more context to what it means to live by values. The values highlighted by study participants included balance, integrity, humility, and simplicity, and newly reclaimed definitions of wealth and success. The values were the source of support for their desired behaviour regarding how to live in alignment with the Spirit of Indigeneity. For example, with the value of integrity supported them to act in alignment with their Spirit, thoughts, commitments, actions, commitments, and other values such as honesty.

These values serve as a guide to their lives. For example, respect guides one's personal and relational domains, and participants strive to offer respect to themselves through self-care, and to others, from young ones to Elders, and to the natural world and the land. The values guide the selection or evaluation of behaviours or events. For example, the value of balance guides one to evaluate their daily life activities to strive for balance. Lastly, the values are ordered by relative importance. The participants highlighted their foundational prioritized values and triaged

their lives to meet them. What was stated in the earlier chapter in the literature review holds truth still, that values sustain a culture and people to ensure their survival in almost any environment as they guide us how to live. Indigenous people in what is now Canada are incredibly resilient to have survived the horrendous violence of colonization. This resilience is rooted in their traditional values that have transcended time from pre-colonial contact and are lived now.

Reclaiming Grief and Reclaiming the History of Colonialism

History is part of the culture (Haste & Bermúdez, 2017). Therefore, reclaiming culture requires reclaiming history. A theme that emerged from the data was the reclamation of the history of colonialism as essential to grief, healing and cultural reclamation. This idea is expressed by Haste and Bermúdez (2017), who state that, "We are historical creatures. The past is present in how we define ourselves, in how we understand our communities and our role in them, and in how we imagine possible futures. Our sense of the past informs the direction of social transformations we envision and in which we partake" (p. 427).

Grief is important to highlight as part of the reclamation in healing because there remains compounded unresolved grief (Brave Heart & Chase, 2016). According to Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998), "American Indians experienced massive losses of lives, land, and culture from European contact and colonization resulting in a long legacy of chronic trauma and unresolved grief across generations" (p. 60). Similar to American Indians, Indigenous people in Canada have experienced colonial trauma and incomprehensible compounded losses:

> Natives have experienced devastating collective, intergenerational massive group trauma and compounding discrimination, racism, and oppression. There is increasing evidence of emotional responses to collective trauma and losses among Indigenous Peoples, which

> may help to inform ways of alleviating psychological suffering and unresolved grief (Brave Heart et al., 2011, p. 208).

One reason that reclaiming grief is required is that to heal, the truth must be known, the impacts must come to conscious awareness, and the colonial traumas must become apparent. Currently, grief is not fully accessible because the truths of colonials remain unknown, and therefore, the impacts are not fully known. Wanganeen (2010) advocates for addressing suppressed unresolved grief within Indigenous healing, as unresolved grief manifests as other challenges, such as addictions and mental health; "This holistic approach to loss and grief assists clients in dealing with suppressed unresolved grief and has enormous potential to be the missing link to healing mental illnesses in the Aboriginal community" (p. 269).

The data illuminated the paradox of reclaiming grief healing while also knowing the extent of the losses from colonization (e.g., the number of children and family members who went to residential school). So, for Indigenous people to heal and recover losses, uncovering the truths of the history of colonialism and investigating the current impacts and harms is called for. Many of the details are still buried by colonial forces. Ramirez (1998) articulates the necessity for making the truths of colonialism known through a museum exhibit to support grieving the current and ongoing colonial traumas as well as the historical traumas, as part of healing:

> Genocide comes in many different forms. A big exhibit breaks down the genocide. There is living and dying on the reservations. We could show the disease. What is going on in the Americas today? In Chiapas, they are taking the land away from the Indian. When I look at this picture of Indians having their hands cut off, it makes me aware. We need to respect the land. We need to respect the creator. I was educated in White schools. I see a

> picture of genocide and I cry healing through grief for my people. Millions of Indians died. This exhibit will help us deal with our feelings … We have to deal with our grief (p. 309-310).

Part of Indigenous healing is reclaiming the truths of colonialism so the grief processes can be fully engaged, and holistic healing can be realized.

Reclaiming Colonial Institutions

The research participants highlighted the reclamation of colonial institutions as sources of cultural empowerment and wellness. It is a remarkably drastic shift in relationship to colonial institutions from colonial strategies of assimilation to, paradoxically, a source of cultural healing and wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity. Health care has been used as a colonial strategy of harm to Indigenous people, pathologizing and disrupting the Indigenous worldview on health and wellness. Matthews (2017) states that:

> Colonialism is the primary distal determinant of Indigenous ill health.-As a process of enforced assimilation of Indigenous peoples, the drive to assimilate Indigenous communities into mainstream Canada continues to this day. Contemporary health care contributes to assimilation through what one Anishnabe healer describes as "cultural erosion" (p. E78).

Not only is Western health care a force of assimilation but it is also pathologization of Indigenous people. For example, "In the context of mental health, as many Indigenous behaviours and experiences are routinely pathologized and treated, often ineffectively, within a Western, psychiatric mental health treatment system" (Persad, 2017, p. 28). However, as Participant I emphasized earlier in this study, health services are integral to a community.

Not just health, but also, child and family services and education are being actively reclaimed as a source of cultural healing and wellness (First Nations Health Authority, 2024b; Round Lake Treatment Centre, 2017; Secwepemc Strong, 2018). However, past and current evidence identifies Child and Family Services as a violent colonial strategy. The colonial assimilation strategy included residential schools, the Sixties Scoop (MacDonald, 2000), and now, the Ministry of Child and Family Services (Bergen, 2021). It is well known that "the legacy of Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop and other policies of assimilation and cultural genocide…including child protection, are continuations of the original pursuit of residential schools (Lindstrom & Choate, 2016, p. 45). Today, "advocates are calling attention to a system of family separation they say is not unlike residential schools—one that continues to this day and continues to harm Indigenous families, they say … residential school. Sixties Scoop. Child welfare. They're all chapters of the same book … just done differently" (Bergen, 2021).

The Ministry of Education, too, has long been part of a colonial assimilation strategy (Caroll, 2009). Caroll (2009) maintains that "A cursory glance at Euro-colonial encounters clearly illustrates the close connection between assimilating Indigenous people and educating them" (p. 21). The Ministry of Health is similarly guilty in its role in the colonization of Indigenous people, from the violent, abusive Indian hospitals (Lux, 2010), to pathologizing tactics (Duran & Duran, 2000). Pathologizing Indigenous people has been a colonial strategy to "ensure that settler colonialism remains immune to scrutiny. By connecting Indigenous peoples to pathology, settlers can continue to understand themselves as the rightful inhabitants and owners of Turtle Island" (Greensmith, 2012, p. 19). Duran and Duran (2000) add:

> The effects of the genocide are quickly personalized and pathologized by our profession via the diagnosing and labelling tools designed for this purpose. If the labelling and diagnosing process is to have any historical truth, then it should incorporate a diagnostic category that reflects the effects of genocide. Such a diagnosis would be "acute and/or chronic reaction to colonialism." In this sense, diagnostic policy imposes a structure of normality based in part on a belief in the moral legitimacy and universality of state institutions (p. 88).

However, in spite of the trauma the colonial institutions have inflicted onto Indigenous people, these colonial agencies are being reclaimed and reinvented by Indigenous people to be a source of cultural healing and wellness and Indigeneity. For example, within Child and Family Services, First Nations are taking back child jurisdiction and creating child and family services that are informed by culture and operate from traditional law. So-called "family interventions" are now cultural interventions. For example, in one community, "the vision is [for Stsmémelt] to implement a nation-based, family-focused, community-driven approach to child and family services. Stsmémelt (Children) is a movement that is based on Secwépemc traditional governance, legal traditional values, Secwépemc stories, Secwépemctsín, and Healing and family preservation" (Secwepemc Strong, 2018, para 1).

Within the education system, institutions, programs, and courses are being reclaimed and decolonized; Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (n.d.) offers one example:

> As British Columbia's Indigenous public post-secondary Institute, NVIT offers innovative and relevant credentials for future leaders in the fields of wellness, technology,

> governance, land and economic development … grounded in Indigenous culture, tradition and Knowledge (para 1).

Within mainstream institutions, there are increasing efforts to decolonize programs and courses. As a response to the recent international calls to decolonize education, Indigenous students are experiencing greater success in education as Aboriginal culture integrated into curriculum (Kanu, 2005). There are some First Nations with culturally-based Indigenous immersive schools for school-aged children. For example, Adams Lake Indian band has created Chief Atam School, a Secwepemc immersive school that is grounded in the language, traditional practices, and beliefs of the Secwepemc (Adams Lake Indian Band, n.d.).

Within the healthcare sector, the province of British Columbia, through First Nations Health Authority and First Nations communities, is reclaiming and self-determining culturally-rooted health and wellness services. For example, "The FNHA is the first and only provincial First Nations health authority in Canada" (First Nations Health Authority, 2024a). Round Lake Treatment Center (2017), for instance:

> approaches healing holistically through the Medicine Wheel and its balance of the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional aspects of our lives to all cultures and nationalities. 'Culture Is Treatment' is our philosophy. The programs are grounded in cultural teachings and practices facilitated by elders and staff (para 1).

Undeniably, there is an inspiring movement toward reclaiming colonial institutions to be a source of Indigenous healing and wellness and connection to the Spirit of Indigeneity.

Reclaiming Personal Wellness

Personal wellness includes the reclamation of one's life and self-determination in regard to how one engages in life and oneself, as well as the internal aspects within self-related actions that would promote cultural wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity. The subthemes within *personal wellness* include the reclamation of Indigenous identity, social wellness, and personal balance of mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical aspects of self. In literature, the definition of personal wellness that most seamlessly aligns with this research is within the realm of positive, blended with community, psychology (Schueller, 2009, p. 923). However, although Western literature is missing the Indigenous aspects of personal and community wellness, there is still some significant overlap. Wellness is understood as both personal and community wellness (i.e., relational). Personal wellness is not only the absence of suffering but is the presence of positive aspects in one's life; wellness is not one simple notion of happiness and health. Wellness is holistic and is how one lives well:

> Wellness overlaps with concepts such as positive mental health, flourishing, well-being, and happiness; however, none of these constructs alone [is] sufficient. Instead, it is a multifaceted concept that integrates signs of well-being with the ability to function well. Put simply, wellness includes both living well and doing well…Wellness, furthermore, is not merely the absence of illness or distress but instead represents the presence of positive characteristics such as positive emotions, positive social interactions, and positive functioning (Schueller, 2009, p. 923).

Reclaiming a Positive Indigenous Identity

> We lived with our heads bowed and our hands folded together. We lived and died and never knew we were Indians.
>
> Silko (1977), *Ceremony.*

I anticipated that reclaiming an Indigenous identity was one of the core strands of wellness; the participants validated this, and other research supports it. However, the research added more context to the notion of identity. What was illuminated was that all the participants carried an identity; it was a matter of whether one's identity was positive and wellness-promoting or shame-based and poisoned by colonization. What I gleaned from the data was that, within healing, the colonial identities and internalized colonization must be overridden and superseded by, subsequently, a positive Indigenous identity within which the foundations of intrinsic goodness and pride are reclaimed. Fortunately, identity is fluid (Poupart, 2003) and can be shifted so that one relates to oneself and one's Indigeneity with pride. One sociocultural environment with life experience shapes identity (Fabio, 2008), so as colonization is unveiled and becomes visible within the historical and contemporary sociocultural Canadian context, it no longer has the same toxic impact, and the new perspective changes one's experience of oneself within one's environment.

Indigenous people with colonized identities, as was pointed out in the previous phase, now can see colonization and all that is wrapped within it; the perverse, bad, and awful identities and racism that have labelled Indigenous people as inferior humans. Colonization having been made visible, it is no longer within someone or who they are, and the separation allows them to reclaim who they truly are as an Indigenous person guided by their Indigenous Spirit. What the

participants intuitively did through restoring their personal narrative happens to be a formalized trauma-healing and therapy approach called *narrative therapy*. Narrative therapy brings forth the internalized narratives that are unconsciously carried by an individual into sight to be externalized and separated from oneself, their self-concept, and self-narrative, to be challenged and re-storied, purged, and revealed:

> Narrative therapy approach in addressing issues of trauma for individuals who have had significant traumatic events over the course of their lifetime, particularly in childhood and adolescence. This chapter considers how the client might leverage narrative therapy to reconstruct his/her/their life story, and, further, how best to work with the client to re-evaluate perceptions of one's experiences, sense of self, perceived power differentials in the environment, and alternative actions the client can take through the re-storying of his/her/their experiences or traumatic events and the yielding effects of those experiences or traumatic events (Gilkey, 2021, p. 137).

Many Indigenous people know the power of stories and narratives, as the culture is oral, both traditionally and, in many ways, in the contemporary context (Iseke, 2013). From Kwaymullina's (2017) viewpoint:

> Story is a practice in Indigenous cultures that sustains communities, validates experiences and epistemologies, expresses experiences of Indigenous peoples, and nurtures relationships and the sharing of knowledge. Storytelling is also a central focus of Indigenous epistemologies, pedagogies, and research approaches (p. 559).

It almost appeared instinctual—one might even say, *wise and cultural*—that the participants engaged in the process of re-storying their personal narratives to reclaim cultural wellness.

Reclaiming Social Wellness

From the data, the theme of reclaiming social wellness became visible. While the theme of social wellness is concerned with one in relation to others, it is placed within personal wellness because the relations provide the space and opportunity for personal healing and the reclamation of cultural wellness via social settings. What was reclaimed included personal visibility and wellness-promoting behaviour, including compassionate, reciprocal, and supportive behaviour.

Personal visibility was interesting to uncover; what became apparent was that, prior to purging internalized colonization, participants felt the need to remain invisible, unseen, and misplaced within the social context, especially where they were the minority. However, this reclamation of personal visibility is a radical act when one has lived under the weight of constant internalized oppression. Liberation, empowerment, and the courage to be seen are transformative; intentional presence is an act of self-acceptance, love, care, and of embracing one's Indigeneity, especially in spaces where Indigenous people are to remain small, unseen, and quiet, or to fill acceptable stereotypical roles. The actions of the participants overcoming internalized colonization and realizing their liberation and the reclamation of visibility and empowerment align with liberation psychology. Moane (2003) describes liberation psychology as:

> The understanding of internalized oppression as an important element in maintaining oppression and of the essential interlinkage between the social conditions of oppression and

> the psychological patterns associated with oppression. Psychological patterns such as a sense of inferiority or helplessness that are associated with oppression clearly have their origins in social conditions of powerlessness and degradation. Such psychological patterns act as a barrier to action and are part of what maintains oppression. Thus, liberation must involve the transformation of psychological patterns as well as the social conditions associated with oppression. Liberation … "involves breaking the chains of personal oppression as much as the chains of social oppression" (p. 27).

Also found within the theme of social wellness are the wellness-promoting behaviours, including compassion, reciprocity, and support. The participants stated that these behaviours required learning as these were not things offered to them as children. In alignment with the participants' stories, the research offers validation. As Gerner and Neff (2015) assert, "Self-compassion feels especially foreign to people suffering from shame and self-criticism as a consequence of trauma, but it is no less essential" (p. 45). Given that these behaviours were not culturally fostered options for many participants throughout their life, reclaiming them is imperative in healing and wellness.

These behaviours are put within personal wellness as one only has the capacity to offer them outwardly to the depth that one can first offer to oneself (Chio et al., 2022; Gustin & Wagner, 2013). Therefore, acting in these ways toward others enhanced personal wellness and facilitated living with integrity. Chio et al. (2022) argue that "it is the ability to be compassionate to the self and to confront one's own vulnerability that eventually contributes to a compassionate approach to others. When individuals can treat themselves with care, they may then have more resources available to provide for others" (p. 1).

Acting with compassion, support, and reciprocity are correlated to well-being; the reclamation of these behaviours unquestionably supports healing and wellness. According to Chio et al. (2022), “Research has consistently shown the beneficial effects of self-compassion on well-being” (p. 1). The reclamation of these behaviours is a radical, transformational, and, within this context, postcolonial healing endeavour.

Reclaiming Personal Wellness through Balance: Mental, Emotional, Physical, Spiritual

Each of the participants in this study explained the reclamation of their personal wellness through the model of balance; mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. The Medicine Wheel offers a way to describe some aspects of personal wellness, but it is not sufficient on its own, since it omits a myriad of other themes and aspects of healing and wellness. Nonetheless, the use of the Medicine Wheel is pragmatic to assist in articulating the four important aspects of personal wellness. From the “teachings from Elders, there is a strong belief that traditional principles of health based on the balance between the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual elements, hand in hand with a traditional healthy lifestyle prevents sickness” (Hill, 2009, p. 37).

What stood out to me was the contemporary application of the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel is special; it holds immense traditional Wisdom that is being reclaimed and used to inspire contemporary healing and wellness (Ford-Ellis, 2019; Mashford-Pringle & Shawanda, 2023). Meissler (1993) writes, “The Medicine Wheel symbol also allows the inclusion of a multitude of other symbolic expressions because it can be divided into different sections that are still connected through the circular form … a teaching device that still has a purpose and meaning in a modern secular context” (p. 94).

Modernization is the reclamation of Medicine in contemporary life. For example, the participants noted the importance of engaging in trauma healing through counselling in the quadrant of emotional wellness. In terms of physical wellness, participants noted sports and walking around malls as being beneficial to them. In the quadrant of spirituality, the differentiation between spirituality and religion became clear, while the harmful aspects of colonial religion are replaced by reclaimed spirituality. In terms of mental wellness, positive perspectives and engagement in ongoing learning were re-engaged. The participants in this study were creative in reclaiming balance within the context of contempt and provided many inspirational examples for others. Throughout the research, there are a myriad of examples indicating how the participants created personal balance in each quadrant.

Reclaiming Relational Wellness

Relational wellness is one of the three pillars of healing that was reclaimed, which is consistent with previous research that found that relations (familial and community) play essential roles in wellness (Fiedeldey-Van Dijk, 2019). Relational wellness is 1) Having positive relations with one's relations, which reflects the theme, *wellness promoting relation*s and *connection to Indigenous lands*, 2) Feeling like one belongs to and with one's relations, which echoes the theme, *Indigenous belonging* and *Indigenous connection through shared colonial pain*, and 3) A direct reciprocal relationship between one's relations and one's wellness, which parallels the theme of *Indigenous wellness contribution*. Community psychology understands that the essential ingredients for wellness are tightly woven with one's relations and community; "Community psychology … requires expanding conceptions of individual well-being to include contextual and community aspects" (Schueller, 2009, p. 932).

Within Indigenous literature, one's relations are foundational to one's existence and intrinsic to one's healing and wellness. For example, "the Kanien'kehaka language actually offers a model for how to reflect the importance of community. As Kanien'kehaka writer, Brian Maracle, describes the language, 'Only when the individual is placed in context does the individual appear'" (as cited in Fagan, 2004, p. 20). The reclamations of one's relations were, in some ways, tragic, as, in many cases, the impacts of colonialism become strikingly apparent. Participants spoke about reclaiming the Spirit, essence, or role of the relation that no longer exists by definition, but they creatively reclaimed relations to fulfill the strengths and gifts of the roles poisoned by colonization. For example, some participants reclaimed the Spirit of a well Elder for guidance because the participant did not have access to an Elder. In the face of colonization, the participants reclaimed their relations, both literally and within Spirit, to heal and move toward cultural wellness.

Reclaiming Wellness-Promoting Relations

Wellness-promoting relationships are those individuals who support the reclamation of cultural wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity. In this study, wellness-promoting relations comprised individuals and social groups who played important cultural roles within someone's life—either literally or represented through the Spirit of the roles, including the Spirit of Elders, literal Matriarchs, the Spirit of community, the Spirit of family, literal Indigenous role models, and the literal wellness-promoting social network. An interesting conflict that the participants navigated was the necessity for cultural wellness-promoting roles—such as those held by Elders and family—yet, in the face of colonization, the data suggest that many Indigenous people do not have access to those wellness-promoting cultural roles. Participants embraced Spirit and

ingenuity to connect to the Spirit, essence of the roles so they could receive the cultural and healing gifts in the absence of the literal person. Whether the participants connected to the voice of an Elder to guide them as a literal Elder would have, or they assigned family roles to non-direct family relations to fulfill the roles, they demonstrated resilience and resourcefulness to healing and reclaim wellness.

Family is imperative to well-being, but, in the case where one's family of origin is not available, one can become close with a chosen family. While not the same as a biological family, a chosen family can still enhance well-being and offer support (Milton & Knutson, 2023). Most of the research on chosen family is within the LGBTQ+ community, where one's family discriminates or perpetuates judgement or harm (Berger, 2024; Cassidy, 2020). Within the Indigenous colonial context, there could be a similar theme, one's family may not be able to be a source of support because of the impacts of colonial trauma. Cassidy (2020) observes:

> significant direct effects for chosen family support and rejection from family of origin with well-being and psychological distress. These results indicate the importance of helping to facilitate chosen family support in the lives of TGD people but also suggest that rejection from a family of origin has a detrimental impact on mental health that chosen family support does not seem to ameliorate (p. 2).

So, while the two populations are unique and their experience is different, there is a potential similarity in the experience of family discrimination, the absence of safety, the lack of support, or the fact that family may be simply non-existent. Both groups are faced with creating a chosen family to fulfill family roles and support their wellbeing.

In the instances where participants described connecting to the voice or essence of an Elder to connect to Wisdom to guide them in healing and wellness, research within the field of psychology has determined that energetic connection as psychic energy is important. For example, in Jungian psychology, "Imaginative activities are seen by Jung as expressions of psychic energy. In the various descriptions of active imagination, the observation of the inner image and the dialogue with inner figures, if possible, are important" (Kast, 2014, p. 680). Brach (2023) uses a meditation-based approach to connect to one's inner resources, or as I understand, one's Spirit. The meditation guides one to connect with the most evolved part of their being—often referred to as their *future self*—for emotional regulation, guidance, support, compassion, and love. Brach (2023) maintains that "We have within us the Wisdom and compassion that can carry us through the most challenging times. This meditation guides us in accessing these inner resources by calling on the most evolved part of our being" (para 1).

Participants demonstrated profound resilience, resourcefulness, and Wisdom. Participants reclaimed wellness, promoting roles offered by their relations for healing and wellness if they were accessible or they created a chosen family. Participants engaged with Spirit to come into relation with the Elder's Wisdom. Reclaiming one's wellness and promoting relations is a spiritual, creative, and intentional endeavour.

Reclaiming Indigenous Belonging

Belonging to one's social group is a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As Adler (2011) suggests, "social feeling is the crucial and deciding factor in normal development" (p. 11). The felt sense of belonging is directly linked to one's health and wellbeing, as Gere and MacDonald (2010) note; "It has become clear that the need to belong has

strong effects on people's cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, and a chronically unmet need has many negative consequences that can profoundly affect an individual's life" (p. 28).

However, at its core, colonization is about severing the ontological Indigenous sense of belonging (Moreton-Robinson, 2020). The historical and contemporary colonial context has implicit and explicit messages of Indigenous not-belonging. For example, the colonial approach created the dilemma of Indigenous identity and belonging, as defined by the Indian status registry and blood quantum, thus determining the amount of Indigenousness one may have. This, in turn, enacted the perfect system to create a felt sense of not belonging to one's Indigenous group, by not being "full" Indian. Participants' responses illustrated the baseline of Indigenous not-belonging and the necessity for the reclamation of Indigenous belonging through the Spirit of Indigeneity, for healing and Indigenous wellness.

Reclaiming Indigenous belonging involves relating to other Indigenous people and engaging with the land and culture. In research, reclaiming Indigenous belonging is a process of reclaiming culture, Indigenous knowing, Spirit (Wright Cardinal, 2017), and collective ancestral ways of knowing that re/humanize the Indigenous collective (Urrieta, 2019). It appears that all the research points to the reclamation of culture and Spirit as intrinsically resulting in the outcome of tethered Indigenous belonging.

Reclaiming Indigenous Wellness Contribution

The data were unanimous in suggesting that contributing to other Indigenous people's healing and wellness is intrinsic to one's healing and wellness. This reciprocal relationship is supported in the literature and in other healing philosophies, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). AA promotes and understands acts of service as essential to purpose and belonging

necessary for healing and maintaining sobriety (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2002). Wellbriety, the comparable Indigenous equivalent to AA, also emphasizes contribution to other Indigenous people's healing, which will, in turn, promote individual wellness, connection to a healing community, Indigenous belonging, culture, and personal growth (White, 2002). Thira (2013) suggests that part of healing for Indigenous people who overcame suicidal crises was through prosocial contribution. However, within a contemporary colonial context, "Contribution in a community struggling with the oppression of colonization can properly be described as activism" (Thira, 2013, p. 22). Activism was a resilience-focused and protective factor in the Indigenous people's lives. White (2002) notes that "The activists discovered that community mobilization was an important part of their own healing and suicide-resilience—contribution and resilience are indivisible within the activists' self/community life-world" (p. 23). Activism was often practiced through cultural-spiritual contribution to one's community.

Within this research and other literature on healing and living in wellness, contribution to others' healing and wellness, especially within one's social group, is a consistent theme. As Participant O affirmed, "My work promotes my wellness. I support people in healing and achieving wellness holistically, and I think it's because my work is a direct reflection of myself; my wellness is, in turn, my clients'. It's seeing it all, as everything feeds into each other. Everything grows on each other."

What was similar across all the participants was wellness contribution through the wellness-promoting roles that emerged from the data, including kinship (i.e., mother, father, aunt, uncle, grandparent), professional helper (i.e., counsellor), Elders, Cultural leaders (i.e., language teacher, ceremony leader), or Indigenous role model. What is important is to identify the areas

where you have gifts to contribute and harness them. If a person is not an Elder, they should contribute as an auntie; if they are not a professional counsellor, they should strive to live as a role model or become knowledgeable in culture and then share it with others. Every Indigenous person can find their unique way to be a source of wellness for Indigenous people.

Reclaiming Indigenous Connection Through Shared Colonial Pain

The participants turned their trauma, which was a source of disconnection, into a source of connection. They used their shared colonial pain and trauma as a source of connection to other Indigenous people. Shared experiences that create social bonds, like trauma, can be considered to be "social glue," and "survivor bonds" (Reeve & Johnson, 2013). For example, Prochazka et al. (2022) note that "shared traumatic experiences from a war zone, including the death of friends, may lead to stronger bonds and feelings of cohesion between the surviving members" (p. 463). While it is known that intergroup othering can occur as a result of oppression (Hwang, 2021) and colonial trauma, the opposite can also be embraced; that is, inter-group connection, by reclaiming Indigenous bonds because of shared colonial trauma. The participants in the present study stepped away from inter-group othering and reclaimed Indigenous connection and belonging in the face of colonial trauma. It appears that sharing painful experiences can promote intergroup cooperation (Prochazka et al., 2022).

Collective trauma, such as the colonial trauma experienced by Indigenous people in Canada, can be a source of social ties and solidarity, creating a unified identity of victims to harm. Yildiz and Verkuyten (2011), for instance, observed this situation with the collective trauma experienced by the Alevis population in Türkiye. This does not mean that one should remain a victim and disempowered but that one should understand the colonial trauma that all

Indigenous people were and are victims of, use that as a source of connection, and transcend the trauma by reclaiming it as a source of connection, healing, and empowerment.

The potentially positive significance of this theme is that there is an opportunity to use Indigenous shared colonial pain as a source of connection rather than a source of disconnection. I understand that colonization, and the trauma that came along with it, was meant to disconnect and individuate Indigenous people from themselves and all their relations. I believe that using colonial trauma as a source of Indigenous connection is a radical act. Instead of seeing each other through the lens of internalized colonization, judgement, and shame, we could shift our view. Instead of understanding one another as individual separate beings, we would return to seeing one another as Indigenous relations and view each other through the lens of our shared trauma history, with compassion and understanding, to inspire connection.

Reclaiming Connection to Indigenous Lands

The participants in this research suggested reclaiming connection to lands, as the land has intrinsic, even unnameable, power and Spirit for healing and wellness. Walters et al. (2011) offer a similar perspective:

> The earth (or land) is both literally and figuratively the first and final teacher in our understanding of our world, communities, families, selves, and bodies. With such understanding, it can be argued that as the land or relationship to land is impacted—physically or metaphorically—so are bodies [and] minds … This sense of relationship with place is inextricably linked to Indigenous traditional ways of being in relation to relatives.

> Metaphorical examples of the manifestations of relational place orientations are revealed in Indigenous constructs of place and beings that inhabit place or space as "relatives" or "relations" as revealed in common references to "mother earth" or to rocks as "grandfathers." We converse with place as if with relatives (p. 168).

The participants in this study explained that reclaiming connection to Indigenous land was maintaining one's awareness of Indigenous land. It is a conscious awareness and acknowledgement of where one resides at any time, whether one is travelling, visiting, or living; it is considering what Indigenous lands they are physically on. Moreover, this theme encourages one to reconnect to their Indigenous lands, if possible, and if not, to connect to the Indigenous lands one has access to. This reconnection prompted a connection to the research participant's Spirit of Indigeneity and their relations, including, as outlined in the quote above, "Mother Earth" and "Grandfather Rocks." Furthermore, it was a place to consolidate and receive Wisdom-teachings and grounding. The culture and language all come from the land (Chiblow & Meighan, 2022; Walters et al., 2011; Watkins, 2001). Therefore, reclaiming Indigenous land supports reclaiming all these things and the Spirit of Indigeneity.

Phase Three: Reclaiming Cultural Wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity Implications

This research offers a preliminary model with illustrations that are unique to the life contexts and intersectionalities of each participant. This research offers contemporary examples and serves as inspiration for others. From the perspective of this research, it is suggested that colonial trauma healing and Indigenous wellness is a possibility for every Indigenous person, as healing and wellness cut across all the intersections of the participants. The framework and stories of the participants can serve as a beacon of hope and offer Indigenous people sources of

contemporary examples for inspiration to catalyze the reclamation of their personal empowerment and exercise their self-determination as they breathe life into each of the phases as expressions of their Indigenous Spirit and Indigeneity. The data serve as illustrative examples of the ways that reclamations are made possible across the intersections of individuals (i.e., on reserve or off reserve, urban or rural, gender, age, family make-up, Nation-belonging, life experience). The themes represent the spectacular ingenuity of the process of healing and of reclaiming cultural wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity across the cultural, personal, and relational domains.

Phase Four: Living Cultural Wellness Guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity

On the basis of this exploratory study data set, a final phase could be an ongoing process, a way of life, in which foundational elements are reclaimed to serve as a basis for individual wellness. For the participants in this study, after the initial three healing phases were more or less complete, the next phase of wellness appeared to be an ongoing process, a way of life. The foundational elements appeared to be reclaimed to serve as the basis for living one's life rooted in cultural wellness. Then, one would continually refine one's life and oneself to be aligned with Indigeneity and Spirit. In this perspective, cultural wellness is an ongoing, moment-to-moment engagement with a life guided by one's Indigenous Spirit or the Spirit of Indigeneity, that is inspired by values, the Spirit of the Elder's voice, and living in a good way.

Living cultural wellness guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity has some overlap with practical spirituality and conscious living, in that both embrace conscious relationships and engagement with life, both embrace Spirit as essential, and both hold up integrity as essential for

aligning action with values and principles that one holds. Ghuman et al. (2019) describe practical spirituality as:

> The art and science of conscious living. Conscious living involves silencing the continuous chatter of the mind in a relaxed playful manner and looking within to connect with what is going inside us. At the same time being in touch with what is happening outside … Conscious individuals do not merely make decisions, rather, [they] think deeply about their decisions, they make decisions that are aligned with their inner self. They are in a job that they want to do and not in jobs that they don't like to do. They are not living and doing things because of a wrong decision or lack of awareness or because of surrendering to the pressure or lure of external circumstances. So, they not only know what they want out of life but also make conscious choices and decisions to have that in time rather than wishfully waiting for it to happen one fine day (p. 49).

Furthermore, integrity is essential to practical spirituality; "This coherence within freedom and variation is integrity—integration. When we are integrated (acting with integrity), within ourselves and with the outside world, we are harmonious with the universe" (Ghuman et al., 2019, p. 51). Practical spirituality does not refer to living guided by the Spirit of an Elder or in a good way, and it makes sense that it would not, as it is not an Indigenous cultural model. However, it does allow for those specific cultural considerations. Practical spirituality references the *inner self*, which could be understood as one's Spirit, the Spirit of Indigeneity, and the Spirit of the Elder's voice that comes through oneself. Living in a good way potentially aligns with living in harmony with the universe through acting with integrity. Practical spirituality is a relevant model that supports this model of living cultural wellness guided by the Spirit of

Indigeneity on three counts; the requirements for 1) conscious awareness and engagement in life, 2) inclusion and importance of centering Spirit, and 3) living with integrity (Ghuman et al., 2019).

The intent of this research was to collect examples from Indigenous people living in cultural wellness to inspire others. The data, collapsed together for phases one through three, demonstrated the colonial trauma-healing process. The role models' data created a potential overarching framework for cultural wellness guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity, and the wellness role models populated this phase's results with a myriad of examples and Wisdom to serve as a source of inspiration for others.

The fourth phase offers consistent domains—cultural, relational, and personal—that were interestingly consistent in phases two and three. The domains have themes with unique stories that serve as examples of how the diverse role models were able to attain cultural wellness connected and guided by one's Spirit. Culture and Spirit serve as the foundation to guide personal and relational wellness. Culture and Spirit provide the foundation for how one engages with the personal and relational realms.

Culture as Foundation

The participants' responses illustrated that culture serves as the foundation that guides one in one's life. Living culture included living guided by the Spirit of our Elders, the Spirit of living in a good way, and living the Spirit of wellness values. From the data, wellness values emerged as cultural values that were adapted to promote personal and all one's relations wellness in the contemporary context. As Participant T previously noted, a contemporary "new warrior" lives with purpose, knowing their cultural values and ways. The wellness values that participants

illuminated are in addition to the values put forward in the *reclamation* phase, which included balance, integrity, simplicity, adaptation, and integration.

The Elder's voice was reclaimed as part of the previous phase and now lives with the person to support them in their life. Individuals connect to the voice as a source of Wisdom and guidance to live in a good way and with integrity in the values put forward. The root word of integrity is *integer*, which means one; "To be in integrity is to be one thing, whole and undivided" (Beck, 2021, n.p.). Living in a good way and living the cultural values is living them in all life's engagements with integrity.

Living Relational Wellness

The culture and the Spirit of Indigeneity were seen to guide relational wellness. Four themes are suggested for living cultural relational wellness. The participants strived for ongoing Indigenous connection. Indigenous connection was seen to be a Spiritual or felt sense of connecting to Indigeneity, past, present, and future Indigenous relations. And, as Participant B pointed out, participation in communal activities, with a good mind, brings forward positive emotions.

First, Indigenous connection was fostered through participants actively engaging with language, cultural activities (i.e., little c culture), acts of service for other Indigenous people, and by creating opportunities for Indigenous gathering and celebration. Second, the Spirit of kinship means connecting to kinship roles by living the Spirit of the roles respective to one's opportunities and relational connections (e.g., an opportunity to play the Spirit of an aunt in one's life). The concept of community support in raising a family was brought forward in this work by Participant C.

Not only did the wellness role models speak of serving important wellness-promoting roles for their relations, but they also allowed their relations to have a reciprocal relationship, which are also are important for their wellness. Good and knowledgeable friends, as Participant T emphasized, can serve as a lifeline.

The Spirit and essence of support was through encouragement, kindness, allyship, honesty, acceptance, compassionate listening, and supporting an individual to live with integrity. And finally, relational wellness is lived through Indigenous contribution through healing and wellness contribution, sharing Wisdom, and serving as a role model, embodying an Elder, culture, and activism. What is important to highlight is the direct and reciprocal relationship of one's relational connections to personal wellness. Similar findings have been identified in research in prosocial behaviour and its correlation to well-being, which affirms that prosocial behaviours are "ingredients of a harmonious and well-functioning society" (American Psychological Association, 2020, para 2).

Likewise, as shown in this research, one's relations provided support to one's personal wellness, such as allyship; the person offering support received the gifts of wellness contribution. Similarly, another example was that as an individual supported culture and offered ceremony for others' healing and wellness, the engagement provided that individual with a sense of Indigenous connection. No engagement is outside the circle of reciprocity, which enhances one's personal wellness and, also, one's relation's wellness.

Living Personal Wellness

Personal wellness is achieved through the Spirit (i.e., intention or essence inspiring meaning and action) in which one engages and integrates the four aspects of personal balance;

physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. First, physical wellness was lived through engagement with good sleep, movement, diet, Traditional Medicine, and a positive wellness-promoting relationship with substances. The second quadrant, mental wellness, was cultivated through examples of routine mental practices, cleanliness, and physical activity. Third, emotional wellness had a myriad of examples, which included intentional time to process emotions, therapy, meditation, mindfulness, presence, boundaries, self-love, self-inquiry, spiritual practices, social connection, physical activity, and humour. Fourth, spiritual wellness, was supported through Indigenous cultural objects, Indigenous ceremonies, both spiritual and religious prayer, nature, and gratitude practice. It was interesting to see the emphasis on the need for ongoing healing, given the ongoing colonizing, racism, and discrimination that Indigenous people face regularly. Not only did the data illuminate the historical trauma that requires healing, but that it also illustrated the context in which Indigenous people live is colonialism, which inflicts ongoing wounds and re-traumatizes.

Interestingly, what emerged from the data was the highly integrated nature of the intention and purpose of one's personal engagements. For example, while one could be engaging in physical activity, such as walking in nature, this also could be supporting the balance of the spiritual and mental quadrants. One engagement could be serving one, two, three, or all four quadrants for balance. There is a direct and reciprocal relationship with each quadrant; if one is addressing physical health, there is always a direct reciprocal relationship with at least one other quadrant. This research has demonstrated a direct relationship between physical activity, physical health, and psychological well-being. Participant C noted earlier the importance of camping

outdoors with her grandchildren, and Participant T shared that walking twice a day provided him with a much-needed outlet to build his emotional health.

There is, according to Hernandez et al. (2018), "evidence of the link between psychological well-being (including positive affect, optimism, life meaning and purpose, and life satisfaction) and physical health, with particular attention to outcomes of mortality and chronic disease incidence and progression" (p. 18). Similarly, spirituality has been shown to have a direct link to mental wellness; as Koenig (2010) notes, "Spirituality is increasingly being examined as a factor in mental health. Recent studies have found that spirituality may serve as a psychological and social resource for coping with stress" (p. 116). What this research suggests is that everything and everyone is linked in a reciprocal relationship to another, mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

Phase Four: Living Cultural Wellness with the Spirit of Indigeneity Implications

Maté (2022) recognizes that the Western colonial culture is toxic and harmful to everyone; he states that "toxic culture" is characterized by:

> The entire context of social structures, belief systems, assumptions, and values that surround us and necessarily pervade every aspect of our lives. The social life bears upon health is not a new discovery, but its recognition has never been more urgent. I see as the most important and consequential health concern of our time (para 6).

This research suggests that the colonial sociocultural context in which Indigenous people exist is unique and is especially harmful, toxic, and poisoning, both historically and presently. First, Indigenous people need to heal historical colonial trauma, and one way to do so is through the three phases, with examples that were provided as a guide; then, as this research suggests,

there is ongoing maintenance as part of living in wellness. This way forward indicates that the participants also circled through the healing phases of ongoing purging of colonization and reclaiming cultural wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity because of the colonial context.

The data showed that the participants made efforts to continue living in wellness, not only because wellness is always a process, but because there was an extra and conscientious effort because of the harmful colonial context. Participants expressed the belief that, without conscious awareness and a critical lens on all the things influencing their lives—without active resistance to colonization and continuing to purge and cleanse it from oneself and life—it would permeate them and poison them again. This might not occur to the same extent that it poisoned them initially, but nonetheless, it is like a toxin of continuous exposure. Therefore, one needs to pay extra and ongoing attention and provide healing for oneself.

At the beginning of this study, I wondered if Indigenous people could heal and be well in a colonial context. The answer was yes, but it is hard; it takes consciousness, deliberate effort and attention. Essentially, I have come to understand Indigenous wellness from the view that we live in a toxic environment that needs extra care and attention to purge, cleanse, and heal, in order to maintain integrity within ourselves and our Indigenous Spirit.

As I combed through the data, naturally, for me, questions arose; Where am I at in the process? Have I purged colonization? If so, where and what kind? In which ways have I reclaimed culture, Indigeneity, and my Spirit? In which ways do I still want and need to? How could I go about doing this, given my life context? How am I living in wholeness, which I have come to learn is living with integrity? Do I live cultural values and if so, how? If not, how can I? How is my personal and relational wellness? Where can I make improvements? Do I live in a

balanced way? Do I contribute to other Indigenous people? For every theme, a personal reflection question arose to inspire me and my wellness. As I wrote the phases, and read and re-read the generous offerings from the participants, I healed. As the model evolved, so did I. If nothing else, I healed and reclaimed wellness and my Indigenous Spirit.

My hope is that, like me, and with the generous gifts from each of the participants, others will have the similar experience I did. The three strands of cultural wellness provide a framework to organize individual inquiry and serve as a source of inspiration. Each strand—cultural, relational, and personal—have illustrated examples of living cultural wellness connected to the Spirit of Indigeneity. Therefore, one implication for this research is to serve as prompts for personal compassionate and supportive inquiry. Potential questions that came to me through the research, that I asked myself that could be applied by Indigenous people include, but are not limited to the following.

How am I living cultural wellness?

Have I reclaimed the values in the reclaim phase? Do I live these values? If so, which ones? Which of these values resonate with me and which do not?

Which values that resonate can I reclaim and begin living?

How would it look to an outside observer to live the values?

How would it feel to live cultural wellness?

How will I know if I am living cultural wellness?

How would I know if I was living guided by my Indigenous Spirit?

When do I not feel connected to my Spirit? How do I know?

Do I live with wholeness and integrity?

Does my integrity get compromised? If so, when?

Where does colonial Western culture challenge my integrity?

What would it look like to live with integrity?

Have I ever felt connected to or guided by Spirit of the Elder's voice? When? What did it say?

Do I live guided by the Spirit of the Elder's voice? When?

What would an Elder say about how I live?

What advice might an Elder give me for my wellness?

Am I connected to the Spirit of Indigeneity?

How can I live guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity?

Could some of these be combined? What are the essentials?

What do I do for my personal wellness?

How do I live in balance each day?

This research represents a blade of grass in a meadow. The discussion of healing and living one's Indigeneity in this contemporary life enveloped by colonialism is sensitive, aspects are taboo, it is complex, multi-faceted and rife with colonial shame but also, paradoxically, the discussion is bold, brave, and liberating. This research offers a framework for colonial trauma healing and living cultural wellness guided by one's Indigenous Spirit, while acknowledging that the framework comes from limited data of 14 participants. Every Indigenous person, hereafter, could add more examples across the depth and breadth of intersectionalities, life experience, and contexts. The opportunities for the ways in which cultural wellness can be lived are endless. I invite other researchers, and those outside of the Academy, to continue celebrating and holding

up Indigenous people who are ingenious in finding and creating ways to live in wellness and connected to Spirit in a colonial context; doing so is colonial resistance and a radical act!

Within this chapter, I have gone into considerable detail outlining the actions needed in each phase of the healing model, supported by the literature, including the call to healing in phase one, purging oneself of colonial influences in phase two, reclaiming what is required to live in wellness in the third phase, and finally, living cultural wellness guided by the Spirit of Indigeneity. In the upcoming, final chapter, I explore the implications for future research.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion and Implications for Further Research

This dissertation culminates in an exploration of the possibilities for future research. At the heart of this research was a personal quest to untangle my own internal conflict; I sensed this was shared by many Indigenous people, especially within my community. I began this dissertation by acknowledging a persistent struggle faced by some Indigenous individuals in contemporary colonial society. My goal was to showcase the resilience of Indigenous people and to document how they reclaim and revitalize their identities in today's colonial landscape—something I have been striving for, personally. I wanted to explore these questions; Who else is on this journey? How are they navigating it? I was eager to hear the stories of Indigenous individuals thriving, despite the ongoing impacts of colonization.

I wrote that, while there is an abundance of exceptional research on decolonization, there is limited focus on the personal process of decolonization in everyday life as a means to achieve wellness and embody Indigeneity. I was growing weary of the recurring narratives centered solely on colonization and healing. I found myself asking, "When do we get to just live and thrive?" Through this research, I came to understand that, for Indigenous people, being born into wellness is not a given—it is not a privilege afforded without intentional healing. Personal and collective decolonization is an integral part of that healing journey. Decolonization is not just a political act; it is a deeply personal process of unlearning internalized colonial influences to create space for cultural reconnection. This realization was not what I expected. It was difficult to accept that wellness, something I believed should be an inherent birthright, requires deliberate healing efforts.

From the outset, I aimed to present narratives that challenge prevailing stereotypes about Indigenous people. I sought out Indigenous wellness experts to articulate what wellness looks like, within a colonial context, alongside role models who actively embody this wellness in their daily lives. Both groups delivered beyond my expectations, illuminating pathways to thrive with pride and self-determination, within the confines of colonial structures. In this respect, the research fulfilled its purpose.

I am profoundly moved, proud, and filled with deep respect and gratitude for every participant who contributed their insights, enriching my understanding of culture, Indigenous wellness, and its contemporary manifestations. As Participant O poignantly stated, “It looks from the outside like I am living a normal life, doing normal things as anyone would do, but, in fact, I am living culturally because of the reasons I am doing them.”

The purpose of this research was threefold. First, I sought to conceptualize and co-create an understanding of contemporary Indigenous wellness within today’s socio-cultural landscape from the perspectives of knowledgeable Indigenous voices. While my intention was to collaborate closely with wellness experts to refine a shared definition through iterative dialogue, the process unfolded differently. The experts provided rich, data-driven insights that naturally shaped a model of contemporary Indigenous healing. Their refusal to conform to my expectations highlighted their integrity and the depth of their Wisdom. They offered more than I anticipated—an authentic narrative about the necessity of healing. They helped me see decolonization not just as an abstract concept, but as a transformative process of shedding colonial imprints to make room for cultural and spiritual reconnection.

My second objective was to honour and share real-life examples of Indigenous wellness in contemporary contexts. The wellness role models did this with remarkable vulnerability and honesty, offering detailed accounts of their personal journeys toward well-being as Indigenous individuals.

The third goal was to support the well-being of the participants themselves. Although I did not formally assess the impact of their involvement, their reflections suggested that participating in this research was meaningful. Common themes included the opportunity to engage in thoughtful reflection on Indigenous wellness—something many had not had space to explore before—and a sense of honour in being asked to participate, which they viewed as both a gift and a validation of their lived experiences. In this way, the very act of participation became a form of Indigenous healing and wellness, contributing to the broader process of reclaiming cultural identity.

Through this work, I set out to contribute new knowledge on how Indigenous wellness is lived and experienced in the present day—and I believe this has been achieved. At the outset of the work, I stated my intention to illuminate the narratives of Indigenous people who have reclaimed their Indigeneity and now thrive in wellness within a contemporary context. I also aimed to critically name and examine the dominant systemic paradigms, epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies that shape Western and Canadian society. This, too, has been accomplished.

Drawing from interviews with seven wellness experts and seven wellness role models, this research opens dialogue on critical questions surrounding Indigenous healing and well-

being. The most profound insight is that Indigenous wellness is fundamentally about the revitalization and reclamation of the Indigenous Spirit. The analysis revealed several key themes:

a) Both groups emphasized that healing is essential to achieving Indigenous wellness; wellness is the natural outcome of this process.

b) Personal healing involves reclaiming cultural practices and reconnecting with the Indigenous Spirit.

c) Despite the pervasive harm of colonial structures, healing and wellness are attainable through continuous, intentional efforts.

d) Reclaiming the Indigenous Spirit requires decolonization—a process of actively unlearning and purging colonial influences.

e) This reclamation is transformative, allowing individuals to live lives rooted in cultural wellness and spiritual connection.

This research highlights a diverse array of inspiring stories, showcasing the unique and innovative ways participants have navigated their healing journeys. Their experiences demonstrate the resilience and creativity inherent in reclaiming cultural wellness and the Spirit of Indigeneity, living authentically as Indigenous people, even in the face of colonization.

This research is exploratory and offers a preliminary model for contemporary Indigenous healing and wellness. Further research could illuminate a myriad of additional themes, and could highlight diversity within the data. I would expect that further research could provide more personal examples, and validate the existing processes and themes. It might also reveal more common patterns, shed light on the significance of certain themes, and add layers to this

proposed model. This model is a starting point and serves as inspiration for Indigenous people today. I hope it acts as an impetus for further investigation of the model I have proposed to offer a critique, perhaps confirmation, and the addition of examples of living in wellness. Such contributions would add diversity and richness to serve as further inspiration.

Lastly, I hope this research brings into light the challenges of being Indigenous in this contemporary context, I hope naming that validates Indigenous people's experience. I hope that this research also illuminates the many paradoxes inherent in the pursuit of Indigenous wellness such as the pressure associated with being Indigenous to be family oriented, while at the same time, for some, having no family to access. I hope this opens the door to begin speaking about the many taboo topics; for example, the critique of traditions and cultural practices that are rooted in patriarchy. I hope this research inspires others to bring a necessary critical lens to some so-called "Indigenous culture," as we strive to reclaim and re-create what it is and how we will live it in today's world. I hope, for those who come into relationship with this research, that they will find some healing, as I did.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions for Wellness Experts

Question One: The Concept of Contemporary Indigenous Wellness

The first question was, "can you please share with me how you understand Indigenous wellness in today's world?"

Question Two: Identifying the Wellness Role Model and How Contemporary Indigenous Wellness is Lived

After the first question was fully responded to, the wellness experts were invited to identify and share their thoughts about the contemporary Indigenous wellness role models who, they believed, exemplify all or parts of the co-created definition of wellness. This question provided data that produced activities and themes from the perspective of wellness experts in regard to how their conception of Indigenous wellness looks, when lived. It takes the abstraction from the first question to pragmatic and concrete application in the second question.

"We have just discussed how you understand Indigenous wellness. Do any individuals come to mind that you believe exemplify and embody wellness, or significant aspects of wellness?"

"Please share what it is about how they live that demonstrates Indigenous wellness."

Interview Questions for Role Models

Interview One: Holistic Wellness Narrative

The question posed was, "Can you tell me about how you live in wellness?"

Interview Two: Intrapersonal Contributors

The interview questions were as follows:

Can you tell me about the physical activities you do that contribute to your wellness?

What is it about _____ that makes it important for your wellness?

Is there anything about _____ that you would see relating to being Indigenous?

Can you tell me about your mind-set, outlook, or mental practices that support your wellness?

What is it about _____ that makes it important for your wellness?

Is there anything about _____ that you would see relating to being Indigenous?

Can you tell me about some emotional approaches or practices that support your wellness?

What is it about _____ that makes it important for your wellness?

Is there anything about _____ that you would see relating to being Indigenous?

What would you consider to be the foundations approaches or practices of your spiritual wellness?

What is it about _____ that makes it important for your wellness?

Is there anything about _____ that you would see relating to being Indigenous?

Interview Three: Relational Contributors

The third interview questions comprised the following:

What roles do you identify with?

What is it about being _____ that promotes your wellness?

What is it about your relationship with your family that supports your wellness?

What is it about _____ that makes it important for your wellness?

Is there anything about _____ that you would see relating to being Indigenous?

What is it about your relationship with your social network that supports your wellness?

What is it about _____ that makes it important for your wellness?

Is there anything about _____ that you would see relating to being Indigenous?

What is it about your relationship with your community that supports your wellness?

What is it about _____ that makes it important for your wellness?

Is there anything about _____ that you would see relating to being Indigenous?

What is it about your relationship with the natural world, your environment, that supports your wellness?

What is it about _____ that makes it important for your wellness?

Is there anything about _____ that you would see relating to being Indigenous?

Have we missed anything that is important?