A CULTURAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY: A SETTLER'S JOURNEY TOWARDS DECOLONIZATION THROUGH SELF-REFLEXIVITY

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ABSTRACT

Before colonization, Southern Alberta was home to the Siksikaitsitapi or the Blackfoot confederacy. From the moment of contact, relations with Settlers have impacted the lives of the Blackfoot people. The enactment of the Indian Act, the formation of reserve lands, and the enforcement of residential school systems are some of the historical methods used to eliminate Indigenous culture (Mitchell, 2020). Indigenous people continue to face a disproportionate amount of trauma and discrimination (Currie, Schopocher, Laing, & Veugelers, 2012). The federal government has focused on reconciling its relationship with Indigenous people, but this must include a decolonization of colonial mentalities. Through an autoethnographical method, I explore my understanding of the Blackfoot culture to evoke change on the individual level. Intentional self-reflexivity is applied to promote a cultural awakening. Through the analysis of personal story the process of decolonization is initiated and through story encourages the reader to initiate their own decolonization.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Adverse Childhood Events
AFN	Assembly of First Nations
CHRT	Canadian Human Rights Tribunal
CPA	Canadian Psychological Association
EMR	Emergency Medical Responder
IRS	Indian Residential School
NWMP	North-West Mounted Police
PBO	Parliamentary Budget Officer
RCAP	Royal Commission on Aboriginal People
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Throughout Canada's history, federal policy has attempted to assimilate Indigenous culture and profit from Indigenous lands using eliminative violence. Acts of legislative oppression include the implementation of the Indian act, the Indian Residential School legacy, and the formation of reserve lands. The enforcement of these policies was rationalized through the mentality of benevolent paternalism, or the idea that Settler policy makers know what is best for Indigenous people (Regan, 2010). This mentality persists today and contributes to the continued oppression experienced by Indigenous people in the form of disproportionate levels of discrimination, and colonial violence embedded in daily microaggressions (Currie, Schopflocher, Laing, & Veugelers, 2012; Mitchell, 2020). In recent years there has been pressure to address the oppressive acts and negative outcomes that have resulted from the colonization of Canada. The Canadian government has established several initiatives to address the historical inequalities and the resultant strained relationship that the Canadian federation holds with Indigenous people. At the heart of Canadian reconciliation policy is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). In 2015, the TRC published its final report identifying ninety-four Calls to Action with the goal of igniting social and political change, ameliorating Indigenous-Settler relations, and eliminating pervasive inequalities.

Canadian reconciliation efforts have been greatly criticized for being focused on fixation and forgiveness. The emphasis on establishing and documenting an apology prioritizes Settler catharsis above the well-being of Indigenous well-being. Federal reconciliation often relies on colonially defined measures and is often implemented concurrently with the continued expropriation of Indigenous land (Gaertner, 2020; Robinson, 2015; Wakeham, 2019). Despite the TRC's (2015) mandate of "commitment to establishing new relationships embedded in

mutual recognition and respect," Canadian reconciliation has falling short of developing relationships and effecting change on an individual level. Robinson (2015) argues that the relational outcomes, or "relational performances" of Canadian reconciliation policy function to enable negotiations on continued land and resource acquisitions. Reconciliation rhetoric is complicated by the continued injustices experienced by Indigenous people, for the economic benefit of the state.

Through the TRC, Canadian reconciliation has informed the public of many of the historical injustices experienced in residential schools providing non-Indigenous and Indigenous Canadians a fuller story of the colonially-induced atrocities of our recent history. This truth learning is an important component of the reconciliation process however in order to have reconciliation, there needs to be a shift in thinking. Colonial mentalities are pervasive throughout Canadian Settler society reinforcing some of the same colonial beliefs that led to many of the historical injustices that Indigenous people have endured (Barker, 2006). The erroneous colonial mentality that First Peoples require help or saving is a long-standing attitude that has contributed to many legislative harms towards Indigenous populations. This paternalistic benevolence persists today influencing Settler-Indigenous relations and reconciliative action. In order for reconciliation to be effective there must first be a decolonization of the colonial mentalities that fed the oppression and dispossession of Indigenous people. Colonial mentalities cannot be relied upon to bring about real reconciliation. Regan (2010) argues that without critical hope, or the idea that change is possible, knowledge of past and present colonial domination and Indigenous oppression can counteract reconciliation and lead to revictimization and feelings of helplessness (Regan, 2010; Shugurensky, 1998) as is often observed in Indigenous communities. Regan (2010) defines this as cheap reconciliation and argues that without critical hope it risks

potentiating harm. This suggests that in order to reconcile Indigenous-Settlers relations, there must be both a decolonization of colonial mentalities and space for action at both the federal and the individual level.

The purpose of an autoethnographical method is to engage in critical reflection and the liberation discourse required to evoke change on an individual level (Chang, 2008; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). A thorough understanding and frequent re-evaluation of my motivations for engagement in this process will be used to further reconciliation with the hope of engaging in genuine truth-seeking and promoting critical reflection in the reader. Jennifer Matsunaga (2016) argues that in Canada transitional justice takes on two forms, reconciliation and resurgence. In order to properly engage in this process, the focus will need to shift from reconciliation as understood on a federal level, to promoting or giving space for resurgence.

The goal of this project has become the decolonization of self. This decolonization is the process of unlearning the colonial mentalities and colonial norms that continue to oppress Indigenous people in order to develop the cultural competency and cultural humility to ethically counsel Indigenous youth and families. I aim to develop a greater understanding of the colonial mentalities that I hold, specifically, the concept of acting in the best interest of others, a mentality that has driven much of the legislative oppression of Indigenous people. This colonial saviourism or benevolent paternalism will be dissected in order to decolonize my beliefs and actions as I engage in the pursuit of a career in a helping profession. This helper mentality and the historical implications will be particularly important as I enter into the field of counselling with the goal of developing the cultural competencies to support an Indigenous population.

Positioning Myself

The concept of self is particularly important when addressing the process of decolonizing on an individual level. The process of unlearning and relearning with the goal of decolonizing the self is contingent on the self being socially constructed and transformable (Chang, 2008), consistent with a social constructivist epistemological framework. To gain a greater understanding of the Blackfoot culture, I engage in an autoethnography, a study of self and culture. In order for this process to propagate transformative action, it is important to identify my conceptualization of the self the theoretical framework applied throughout the autoethnographical process. Stewart (2009) argues that approaching counselling from a social constructivist foundation is particularly important when counselling Indigenous families. She argues that the social constructivist lens allows for co-construction within the counselling setting allows for self-determination (Stewart, 2009), a vital component of resurgence. This co-construction of self in the counselling setting is consistent with my personal theoretical orientation, and necessary for minimizing the power dynamic within the counselling setting.

Positioning the self.

In order to engage in an alteration or transition of the self, it is important to understand my conceptualization of the self. The self is viewed through different lens that range in autonomy, power and connection to others (Fishbane, 2004). The view of the self that is most consistent to my theoretical framework of counselling, and most consistent with a social constructivism epistemology in the relational self. This relational narrative of the self is less individualistic than the prevailing Western cultural view of the self. The relational self puts less emphasis on self-creation and self-determination, and explores the social world of the self (Fishbane, 2004). The relational self is more consistent with my theoretical counselling

orientation of family systems theory, and more consistent with an Indigenous way of knowing (Fishbane, 2004). It is important to approach the self in a manner consistent with the Indigenous conceptualization of the self when entering into a helping role as Duran (2006) argues that non-Indigenous forms of healing can be detrimental to the individual and be a form of continued colonial oppression.

The autoethnographical process aims to transform the self through intentional reflection, however, the process of transformation is something that does not necessarily require the formal engagement in an autoethnography. The dynamic nature of the self is important in understanding where change has already occurred and what intentional change is still required. It is also important to understand that despite the significant change to self as the result of development, the life events that have effected this change continue to be relevant in positioning myself. Pitard (2017) argues that together what I know, and how I came to know it are the result of my philosophical beliefs. Determining what philosophical beliefs that I hold, how these beliefs have developed and have been reinforced, and how this led to my current social location will enable ongoing transformative action and provide a deeper understanding of the societal systems that influenced me throughout my lifetime.

My Theoretical Framework, What I Know and How I Came to Know

My worldview is important to consider and to declare as it is the lens behind my beliefs, behaviours, and actions (Little Bear, 2012) and this standpoint establishes my unique perspective. Puig et al. (2008) argue that when conducting qualitative research, the researcher must articulate their theoretical foundation and epistemological assumptions in order to produce consistency and provide transparency when collecting and analyzing subjective data. This links the research directly to the researcher, allowing qualitative data to be consumed in a less general

but more genuine sense. Social constructivism is a theory that prioritizes cultural influences in the genesis of an individual's epistemological beliefs and views leaning as a social process (Schrader, 2015). Constructivist theory argues that perspective is a socially negotiated construct (Sivan, 2010). This negotiation is guided by language, people, culture and socialization (Puig, Koro-Ljungberg, & Echevarria-Doan, 2008; Schrader, 2015). The process of autoethnography is supported by the notion that perspective is the result of social negotiation, and this socially constructed position, can be renegotiated to through transformative action.

Centering myself in a social constructivist framework will provide the necessary foundation for change. The goal of engaging in this autoethnographical process is to initiate the process of renegotiating my social self and shifting to an identity that reflects a more decolonized position. As much of the anticipated negotiating and constructing of this identity will be done in the context of my experience working as a school counsellor, it is important to acknowledge that my counselling approach is grounded in family systems theory, a theoretical approach grounded in social constructivism (Puig, Koro-Ljungberg, & Echevarria-Doan, 2008). Family systems theory argues that individual development is biologically rooted in interdependence, through differentiation and togetherness, the individual identity is developed (Hoboken, 1994). The application of this framework in the counselling setting views the individual as a component of a greater system this parallels the social constructivist framework that will ground me throughout the process of autoethnography. The emphasis place on interdependence is also consistent with an Indigenous perspective (Blu Wakpa, 2016).

My Social location

The primary role that has enabled me to reflect upon self and acknowledge that a decolonization of self is necessary, is my role as a counselling practicum student. I have recently

completed my practicum in counselling psychology at an elementary school in a rural community that borders the Kainai reserve. In this role I have had the unique opportunity to work directly with children and families from the Kainai nation. This experience has prompted a desire to better understand the Blackfoot culture and rethink my colonially-derived belief system with the ultimate goal of being able to provide culturally appropriate counselling supports to this population. This role, along with a long-standing professional interest in helping occupations, is an important component of my identity that is necessary to acknowledge. The consistent tendency to situate myself in a helping role is essential in understanding what influences have led me to where I am, and what potential harm can come from a colonially embedded view of what it means to be in a helper. There have been numerous situational influences, events and decisions that have ultimately led me to enter into the counselling profession, that will be important to explore.

I grew up in Lethbridge, Alberta. I was raised primarily by a single mother with my two brothers. My role as a sister is a part of my identity that carries a lot of weight. Much of what I have come to know has been learned through the eyes of a sister. My brothers and I are all born within three and a half years. We are very close in age at 31, 32, and 33 years old. My younger brother has experienced mental health challenges from the time we were in high school, and my role as his sister has undoubtable influenced my decision to enter the field of mental health. This is a critical component of the self that will be explored throughout the autoethnographical process.

Another important component of my social location is my role as a student. I have spent the majority of my twenties in post-secondary education and continue to do so into my thirties. The academic context and role of learning has contributed to my philosophical standpoint. My

initial pursuit for greater knowledge was in the form of basic science. When I was twenty-two, I relocated to Edmonton to complete a degree in medical science where I learned to value quantitative analysis and objective and generalizable results. In this role, the exclusion of personal spiritual beliefs was important. Objectivity and empirically validated results were prioritized and reinforced a worldview lacking in spirituality. Much of what I have come to know about the natural world, about self, and about others, has been filtered through a scientific lens.

The value system driving much of my behaviour in my current roles as a sister, a helper, and a student, is also significantly influenced by my philosophical viewpoint. These roles parallel some of the common traditional roles of Blackfoot women and the importance placed on family and community connectedness (Eli, 2013). I place a significant value on academic achievement, independence, financial autonomy, and physical achievement most notably regarding the natural world. These values center around personal autonomy independence, and differ significantly from some on the common traditional values of Blackfoot women that are centered around collective wellbeing (Eli, 2013). I have learned to view independence as success and scientific evidence as truth. These are values that have greatly influence how I interact with the world and will need to be reconsidered when engaging in a decolonization of self. I was raised to view organized religion as false and weak, I have adopted this attitude from my mother and applied this to all concepts of entities greater than the physical, tangible, measurable world. When considering the deep-seated colonial beliefs that I hold, I must acknowledge that my lack of spiritual connection to anything greater than myself is a significant barrier to understanding the Blackfoot way of knowing. Duran argues that holding spiritual connection is prerequisite to entering into a healing relationship (Duran, 2006). The socio-political structure of democracy

also influences my behaviour, I value the majority rule, and often view fairness in terms of the majority vote, a social structure that is colonial in nature.

Woven into my social location and my belief system is a deep love for the natural world. I have shifted from mountain warrior in need of another objective to conquer, to ambitious traveller seeking my next great story to check off my bucket list, to a role of admiration and appreciation. This love has taken many forms and has led me back to Southern Alberta. My approach to international travel has shifted throughout the years, but my love for exploration of the natural world and adventure have persisted. My identity as a traveller is very near to me and is something that I will need to unpack throughout the autoethnographical process.

When considering the goal of self-decolonization, it is important to acknowledge my social location as a white woman in Southern Alberta. Claiming this majority status is an important part in acknowledging how the colonial system has influenced my identity and way of knowing, and it is important to explore what that means in terms of colonial privileges and what role I can have in the initiation and the propagation of decolonization. The use of a decolonizing perspective will enable the identification of privileged epistemologies (Kovach, 2009), allowing for liberation discourse and transformative action. Liberation discourse theory as described by Buttelli & Le Bruyns (2018) is the exploration of interculturality through decolonial reflection that demands an investigation of existing exclusion, marginalization and dehumanization. Liberation theology has demonstrated to be instrumental in the political contexts including dictatorships and anti-apartheid movements. Liberation theory is increasingly adopted in many social movements where change has been hindered by a continued regime of coloniality (Buttelli & Le Bruyns, 2018) It is important to acknowledge that I am exploring the Blackfoot culture through the self as the Other or as a Settler. The concept of Othering is a process of

differentiation or social classification where one group defines another. Acknowledging the engagement in the process of Othering is important as this means of separation social exclusion and sub-ordination (Watsjold, Welsh. & Ilgen, 2018). For the purpose of this project, I have situated myself in the position of Other, exploring the Blackfoot culture. The goal of this process is not to shame the self for learning from a colonizing system, but to relearn through observation, interaction, self-reflection, liberation discourse, and change through transformative action.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this autoethnography is to describe my experience of decolonizing myself and acquiring a greater understanding of Blackfoot people. Much of the work done in this autoethnography happens at the physical and cultural interface between researcher and Blackfoot children and families. In my role I must also navigate the intersection between counsellor and researcher and how these roles with different parameters interact with individuals of the Blackfoot community. The application of the social constructivist framework suggests that the social context is a critical component to shifting the epistemology of the researcher. A true understanding of the cultural context requires a deep understanding of the historical events that have influenced Settler-Indigenous relations. Some of the resources utilized in this knowledge-gaining process group all Indigenous peoples together, this is an approach termed cultural glossing (Duran, 2016). Duran argued that glossing or generalizing the experience of Indigenous people can be used to combat colonial strategies designed to create division among First Peoples. The danger to cultural glossing by viewing Indigenous people as a homogenized group is the loss or dilution of knowledge or the risk of incorrectly extrapolated individual data to make cultural assumptions.

The purpose of this study is to develop a greater understanding of the culture of the individuals and families that I work with, specifically the Blackfoot people. Within this context, glossing is unavoidable, there is a tremendous diversity within the Blackfoot culture and I am only exposed to a small portion of it. This being said I aim to be as specific as possible to report on the beliefs and practices of the individuals I engaged with from the Blackfoot community, holding the understanding that while the lessons gained from this experience may be applied to a broader context, the interactions are unique to the individuals with whom I will interact with.

This is not to say that I will not apply the truth-seeking process to other Indigenous cultures, however, the focus of this study is to explore my assumptions and beliefs specific to the Blackfoot culture. I aim to minimize the use of cultural glossing throughout and acknowledge that Indigenous cultures and communities possess many similarities and differences in language, religion, modes of governance, and experience.

The focus of this project is to investigate the relationship that I hold with First Peoples and the colonial institutions that have influenced that relationship. This identifies the importance of not only understanding the events of colonization and the outcomes of this colonization, but it also suggests an important role for understanding what actions have been initiated towards remedying the colonial state. Several reports, commissions, and calls for change have been initiated to promote a decolonization and repair Indigenous-Settler relations. A timeline of these events is outlined in appendix A (Figure 2.1).

Historical Context

Throughout Canadian history several policies have been implemented to segregate Indigenous populations from settlers in a national effort to eradicate Indigenous culture. Some of these political interventions include geographically limiting and isolating policies including the establishment and maintenance of reserve lands, and the implementation of a pass system (Brockie et al., 2015). Brockie et al. (2013) describe the historical trauma experienced by Indigenous populations as a "collective experience of violence perpetrated against Indigenous peoples in the process of colonizing" (p.2) and argue that this has led to an unresolved humanitarian crisis.

Traditional Life

The Kainai First Nation is one of four First Nations in the Blackfoot Confederacy (Crop Eared Wolf, 2007). The Kainai First Nation is Canada's largest reserve covering 876 square kilometers within the Blackfoot traditional territory (Crop Eared Wolf, 2007; Price, 1999). The traditional social structure of the Kainai differed greatly from the colonial approach practiced today. The Kainai people approached leadership in a non-hierarchical way, with the women taking on the leadership roles of Holy Woman, Chief/Warrior and Storyteller/Educator (Eli, 2013). The traditional leadership roles were situationally determined based on the demand of the task and the skill of the people (Crop Eared Wolf, 2007). The Kainai people were buffalo[1] hunters and almost exclusively dependent on the hunt for survival (Price, 1999). Traditional Blackfoot ways of knowing are centered around kinship relationships and communication with the natural world (Bastien, 2004). The relationship to the natural world carried great spiritual importance with sacred stories of the land and animals playing a significant role in the Blackfoot way of knowing (Aftandilian, 2011). The importance placed on relationship and connectedness is much different than the Eurocentric pursuit of knowledge through validated and generalizable science.

An important component of the Blackfoot way of knowing is the use of oral tradition where children learn oral teachings from their grandparents, or storytellers within the tribe (Aftandian, 2011). This traditional form of education functions to reaffirm the Blackfoot way of knowing (Bastien, 2004). Language plays a very important role in transmitting knowledge. Indigenous languages tend to be very action and process-oriented reflecting the importance of

[1] Buffalo is a colloquial term for the Plains bison. Buffalo is still the common way to refer to this species and I will use buffalo throughout this paper.

the relationship to the natural world (Little Bear, 2012). Other traditional ways of knowing through communication with the natural world are observed through ceremony, meditation, prayer, sacrifice, and offerings that teach moral and ethical concepts (Bastien, 2004). Some knowledge is sacred and is considered to belong to the tribe and is kept sacred by specific knowledge keepers (Little Bear, 2012). Bastien (1999) explains that colonization initiated a shift away from this traditional way of knowing and way of surviving.

European Contact

The initial contact with European Settlers marked the beginning of great change to the Blackfoot way of knowing. The initial trade between Europeans and the Blackfoot people was mediated through Cree and Assiniboine middle men. This trade began in the 1720s and initiated a change in the way of life of the Blackfoot peoples (Binnema, 1992). This provided the Blackfoot people European goods that increased the efficiency of the buffalo hunt, and produced a greater demand for Buffalo robes and hides (Dempsey, 1987; Price, 1999). As Europeans moved west, they established trading posts on the edge of the Blackfoot territory and began trading directly with Blackfoot communities. This direct trade resulted in the diminished need for the Cree and Assiniboine middlemen, and their relations became increasingly competitive (Binnema, 1992; Lanno, 2016). European contact brought trading opportunities, access to arms and ammunition, and increased friction between the Cree and Blackfoot (Crop Eared Wolf, 2007; Lanno 2016). The acquisition of horses shifted the relationship the Blackfoot people held with the buffalo, and had a great impact on the Blackfoot way of life. Horses became an important component of the hunt, trade, travel, conflict and Blackfoot life including social and religious practices (Bastien, 2004).

In 1867 the Dominion of Canada was established. Canadian officials viewed treaty-making as a means to facilitate settlement, and in 1871 the first two treaties had been signed (Albers, 2015; Figure 2.1). The Blackfoot people, who were facing a continued loss in buffalo numbers also experienced a devastating loss to smallpox in 1869-1870 (Crop Eared Wolf, 2007). European Settlers became increasingly interested in the Blackfoot territory for commercial and agriculture expansion, and in 1874 the Mounted Police arrived on the Blackfoot territory and settlers were soon to follow (Price, 1999).

European expansion into the Blackfoot territory was also influenced by Euro-American expansion in the United States. The Lakota peoples of the northern great plains resisted the American expansion into their land. This resistance was met with military action killing many and leaving thousands to flee the area and move North (Felton, 2006; Price). During this emigration, approximately 5000 Lakota people fled into Canada seeking refuge (Price, 1999). This migration of Lakota people corresponded with European efforts to colonize the Blackfoot territory in Canada, and the continued decline of the buffalo. In response to the arrival of Lakota refugees, the Canadian government implemented what Felton (2006) argues was a starvation policy. The implementation of this starvation policy is a demonstration the role Canadian politics played in deaths of many Indigenous people (Daschuk, 2013).

The overhunting of the buffalo through increased competition and trade, the smallpox epidemics, and the arrival of the Mounted Police, all disposed the Blackfoot people to harsh conditions that drove them to sign the Treaty 7 and ultimately the formation of the Kainai Nation (Blood) (Lanno, 2016). Hubbard (2014) argues that the colonial state systematically inflicted genocide on the First Nations people through the slaughter of the buffalo and the removal of

calves in a deliberate attempt to eliminate the First Nations people. This loss of buffalo was used as an act of eliminative violence and directly targeted the First Nations people (Mitchell, 2020).

Treaty 7 and the Kainai Reserve

On September 22, 1877, Chief Red Crow signed Treaty 7 forever altering the way of life of the Kainai people (Price, 1999). The signing of Treaty 7 shifted life for the Kainai people from independent, nomadic buffalo hunters, to designated settlements on reserve lands, and a new dependence on the Canadian government (Ewers, 1982). This written agreement between the Blackfoot people and the Canadian government, has been criticized for how the land surrender had been communicated to and understood by the First Nations chiefs (Dempsey, 1987; Price, 1999). Treaty 7 was mediated by the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP). James F. McLeod entered the role of Indian Commissioner for the NWMP, and through his positive and trusting relationship with the Blackfoot chiefs he assisted in promoting the signing of Treaty 7 (Dempsey, 1987; Price, 1999).

Treaty 7 dictated a land surrender in exchange for a cash annuity, schools, and agriculture assistance (Price, 1999). Dempsey (1987) summarizes the treaty terms including; a cash annuity of twelve dollars for each person for the first year followed by five dollars annually for perpetuity, reserve lands would be based on a density of five persons per square mile, with the right to hunt on unoccupied land, two thousand dollars would be offered to the bands for the purchase of ammunition, salaries for teachers, each chief received a suit of clothing, a riffle, a medal, and a flag at the signing, and chiefs and councillors would receive a suit of clothing each three years, each chief and councillor received ten axes, five handsaws, five augers, one grindstone and files and whetstones(Dempsey, 1987). The agreement dictated that once settled, each family would receive between three and four cows depending on the size of the family, and

one bull for each chief and councillor. The treaty dictated the surrender of all rights to their hunting grounds (Dempsey, 1987).

Following the signing of Treaty 7, controversy over the land allotment for the Kainai reserve erupted when the land set aside for the reserve did not meet the five person per square mile size that had been dictated by the treaty (Dempsey, 1987). In 1887, Mormons from Utah settled on the disputed land complicating land claims and brought questions of an unfulfilled treaty agreement (Dempsey, 1987). In 2019, following a 40-year land claim battle between the Kainai people, and the Canadian government, a federal court ruled that 160 square kilometers of Southern Alberta should have been included in the Kainai territory, the court rejected the claim that the land that Cardston is built on was initially agreed upon as part of the Kainai territory (Grant, 2019). Today, the Kainai reserve shares a border with several small communities who are primarily of the Mormon faith. My practicum placement was completed in this cultural juxtaposition, a geographic location with a complicated history that is greatly influenced by the signing of treaty seven and colonial settlement from the south.

The Indian Act

European colonization in Canada has a long history of legislative action designed to acquire land and mediate the autonomy of the First Peoples. This legislative action was done without the participation of the First people, and greatly impacted their way of life (Leslie, 2002). In 1876, the pre-Confederation legislation regarding the First Nations people was consolidated into the Indian Act (Leslie, 2002) much of this legislation targeted the assimilation of First Nations culture into Settler society (Henderson, 2020). The Indian Act provided the federal government with power over the First Nations way of life including the political structures, governance, education, and cultural identity. After several amendments, the Indian

Act continues to legislate the administration of Indian status, regulate First Nations governments, manage reserve land, and control cultural identity through blood quantum (Henderson, 2020). Henderson (2020) argues that the Indian Act has negatively impacted generations of First Nations people, enabling trauma, human rights violations, and a disruption in the social and cultural ways of knowing. The Indian Act dictated the transformation of social structures from a non-hierarchical system to a patriarchal democratic system of elected political leaders, shifting from leadership based on harmony, respect and integrity, to the Eurocentric concept of majority rule (Bastien, 2004; Crop Eared Wolf, 2007). The restrictions placed on the autonomy of First people by the Indian Act has led to an intergenerational cycle of unemployment, overcrowding, poor health and a dependence on the federal government (York, 1990).

Indian Residential School System.

One of the most significant acts of eliminative violence was the implementation of residential schools. Wolfe (2006) argues that the colonization of North America can be considered a structural genocide, and that acts like the residential school system that function to assimilate a culture can be more effective at eliminating a population than conventional forms of genocide. In his book *Healing the Soul Wound,* Duran (2006) argues that the culmination of culturally genocidal practiced that have been inflicted on Indigenous populations across Canada have led to a "soul wound."

In the late 1800s the European mentality of benevolent paternalism towards Indigenous people culminated in a group of policies aimed at assimilating the 'savage' and 'uncivilized Indians' into the Settler way of life and way of knowing (Bombay, 2014; RCAP, 1996; Regan, 2010, p. 5). One of the most notable interventions was the creation of the Indian Residential School (IRS) program, jointly established by the Canadian government and various churches

(Mosby & Galloway, 2017; Regan, 2010). This system was implemented by educators and government and church officials, and was aimed at removing children from their culture in an effort to 'kill the Indian in the child,' (Bombay, 2014; Mosby & Galloway, 2017) with the mission to separate Indigenous children from their culture and assimilate them into the colonial culture (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996). According to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), IRSs were initially developed in response to colonial intolerance towards the distinctiveness of Indigenous populations. The enforcement of IRSs often consisted of Indian agents or RCMP forcibly removing children from their family homes (Regan, 2010). The assimilation strategies utilized by the IRS programs prohibited children from speaking their traditional languages or practicing their cultural traditions, and exposed Indigenous children and youth to a multitude of abuses including physical, emotional, sexual, and cultural abuses (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), 2015; RCAP 1996; Bastien, 2004; McKenzie, Varcoe, Brownes, & Day, 2016). Regan (2010) argues that the abuses experienced in the IRSs contribute to "an intergenerational history of dispossession, violence, abuse, and racism that is a fundamental denial of the human dignity and rights of Indigenous peoples" (p. 5). The implementation of Indian Residential Schools targeted Blackfoot ways of knowing and shifted traditional values.

In Southern Alberta there were two residential school programs on the Blood reserve, St. Paul's residential school, and St. Mary's residential school. St. Paul's residential school was run by the Catholic church, and was in operation from 1898-1988, and St. Mary's residential school was run by the Anglican church from 1893-1975 (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2021).

There have been several responses to the Canadian residential school program with many of the reconciliation initiatives focused on finding truth and teaching this history in a way to prevent the same unjust treatment from occurring in the future. Included in the calls to action from the TRC are seven calls to action directly related to education and five directly related to child welfare practices. This truth-seeking initiative is complicated by each provincial government having control over education and over the specific curriculum taught. The current Albertan government has recently been overwhelmingly criticized by educators for proposing a curriculum focused on a more Eurocentric perspective of Canadian history, and for failing to include an accurate Indigenous perspective (Baig, 2021).

The ongoing truth seeking has recently led to the discovery of a mass grave site at a residential school in Kamloops, BC (Trembath & Rieger, 2021). The TRC estimates that over four thousand children died while attending residential schools across the country with over 800 in Alberta (Trembath & Rieger, 2021). In response to this finding, Indigenous leaders across the country are putting pressure on the Canadian government to address this abuse and locate the missing children. The Blackfoot community in southern Alberta have spoken out about the damage of residential schools, and the overdue action required to identify and remember the children who never came home (Bay, 2021; J. FirstCharger, personal communication, June 1, 2021).

The Sixties Scoop

The inhumane apprehension of Indigenous children at the hands of the benevolent state is often positioned through popular discourse as an artefact of the past (McKenzie et al., 2016). As Residential Schools began to close across the country, the apprehension of Indigenous children continued through what is now referred to as the Sixties Scoop. The disparities caused by

provincial services being unable or unwilling to support individuals living on and off reserve lands prompted pressure from the Canadian Association of social workers and the Canadian Welfare Council to include changes in the 1951 Indian Act to include the extension of provincial services to the reserves (McKenzie et al., 2016). This is a demonstration of the paternalistic nature of many legislative actions that in the end contributed to forced dependency on the government. This amendment included child welfare laws that promoted the continued state-led apprehension of Indigenous children through a new legal framework (Johnston, 1983), and the continued destruction of the traditional kinship system and the Indigenous ways of knowing (Blackstock, 2009). These legislated acts of paternalistic benevolence suggest a critical role for self-awareness and cultural understanding when working with children and families both in the Eurocentric institution of education and in the counselling setting.

From the 1960s into the 1980s, Indigenous children were again removed from their families and communities, this time by child welfare workers (McKenzie et al., 2016), and placed in the care of the benevolent Settler. The Eurocentric understanding of the family unit was used to justify this removal in another act of saving the Indian from themselves.

Contemporary Life

The following section focuses on the present-day. This includes some of the health and sociological outcomes of longstanding colonization. The present-day has often been referred to as a post-colonial era. This position has the potential to create an inappropriate separation between past colonial intervention and the challenges and disparities that Indigenous populations are currently experiencing. This designation functions to deflect responsibility and drive a continued oppression. Southern Alberta is different than it was during the 19th and 20th centuries. Settler-Indigenous relations have changed as have government policy. This is not to argue that

colonization and the long-standing colonial beliefs and institutions aren't still prevalent in the everyday experience of Indigenous Canadians. The contemporary life includes both the outcomes of centuries of colonization and the continued colonial influence.

Child Welfare

The IRS programs present an overwhelming demonstration of the harmful effects that colonialism had on Indigenous children and families. The emphasis on residential schools often overshadows how colonial dominance and paternalistic benevolence continue to effect Indigenous children and families (McKenzie et al., 2016). Neocolonial saviourism continues to pathologize the Indigenous way of knowing through the over-involvement of an underfunded child welfare system in Canada that is built upon a Eurocentric understanding of family (McKenzie et al., 2016). Following the initial residential school program and the Sixties Scoop, this third phase of large-scale state removal of children from their families continues to occur across Canada (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), 2016), and continues to act on the goal of assimilating Indigenous children into the Euro-centric ways of life. The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) has recently ordered the Canadian government to pay compensation to First Nations children who were discriminated against and harmfully removed from their families and communities from 2006-2020 (Office of the Parliamentary Budget (PBO), 2020). This order estimates that between 19,000 and 65,100 Indigenous individuals are eligible as a result of being unnecessarily removed from the family home and community (PBO, 2020).

Indigenous Disparities

Presenting the socioeconomic and health disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians is a means to understand the colonial legacy. It is important to acknowledge that these disparities are not the result of an inherently sick people but are the result

of genocidal colonial interventions. The process of colonization has created a power differential that continues to permeate into Canadian education, justice and health care systems (Chung, 2019).

The ways of knowing and living of the First Peoples has been greatly disrupted after hundreds of years of colonization. The act of colonization is a process that severs First Nations people from their identity through a destruction of natural alliances with kin and with the natural world (Bastien, 2004). Colonization has also been demonstrated to be the most significant social determinant of health in Canada and globally (Czyzewski, 2011; Smallwood, 2020; World Health Organization (WHO), 2007). Some of the negative health outcomes associated with Canadian colonization include a significant decrease in life expectancy and a greater prevalence of metabolic disorder (Dyck et al., 2010). There is a global Indigenous epidemic of diabetes that is linked to the level of colonialization experienced (Harris, Thompkins, & TeHiwi, 2017). This is evidenced by lower rates of diabetes in Indigenous populations who have maintained traditional cultural practices, and higher rates in populations who have experienced significant colonial conflict (Harris et al., 2017).

The colonization of Canada included genocidal acts including a mass depopulation through acts of forced displacement, military action, a systematic removal of children from their parents, the unintentional spread of disease, and acts of cultural violence aimed at the extermination of the Indigenous ways of knowing (Duran et al., 1998; Evans-Campbell 2008; Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), 2019; Smallwood, 2020; RCAP, 1997). The Canadian government's history of acting under racist assumptions and paternalistic benevolence has perpetuated and legitimized this genocide and has left First Nations people to depend on the same social structures that stripped them of their traditional identity. It

has been argued that we have now entered a "post-colonial state," or an era of calling out past action in the name of reconciliation (Czyzewski, 2011). First Nations people continue to face the fallout of these historical acts that persist within Canadian law, and Indigenous-Settler relations.

Mental Health Disparities. Along with the disparities in physical wellbeing, Indigenous Canadians present with significant mental health disparities. The disproportionate rates of mental health concerns in Canadian Indigenous communities are often referred to as a mental health crisis (Stewart, 2008). Indigenous people have a disproportionate rate of life-trauma in the form of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Brockie et al., 2013; Currie et al., 2012), and an increased vulnerability to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bombay, 2014; Deters et al., 2006).

First Nations people face a disproportionate rate of death from violence, drugs and alcohol (Bastien, 2004; Czyzewski, 2011). Compared to the national average, suicide rates are five to seven times higher in First Nations youth, and eleven times high in Inuit youth (Government of Canada, 2006; Barker, Goodman, & DeBeck, 2017). This increase in the prevalence of suicide has prompted community leaders in several First Nations communities to declare states of emergencies across the country including the Neskantaga First Nation, the Onigaming First Nation, and the Pikangikum First Nation (Barker et al., 2017). The increase in youth suicide across the country has marked an Indigenous mental health crisis that demands effective therapeutic interventions (Barker et al., 2017). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) released a special report in response to the emergency rates of suicide among Indigenous youth, identified that shame and confusion regarding personal identity was the most frequently identified concern (Barker et al., 2017; RCAP, 1996). The loss of cultural identity is

associated with an increase in anxiety and depressive symptoms, both common reasons for seeking out counselling services (Kent & Bhui, 2003).

From the initial arrival of colonizing Europeans, there have been multiple attacks on Indigenous culture. Arguably, many of the colonial beliefs about Indigenous people that lead to historical oppression, persist today informing the thoughts and actions of Canadian Settlers. Czyzewski (2011) argues that linking mental health outcomes in Indigenous populations to the historical injustices of colonization could alter the relationship between Settlers and First people and promote healing. This is consistent with the Indigenous way of knowing through relationship and prioritizes the Indigenous-Settler relationship in the healing process.

Social determinants of health rely on the premise that our environment and our culture are socially constructed. This suggests that the social context that supported the oppression and dispossession of First Nations land and culture through a colonial mentality of paternalistic benevolence, can be socially deconstructed and reconstructed. Paulette Regan (2010) argues that Canadian citizens are ultimately responsible for the actions of the government, and failure to confront the benevolent paternalistic mentality that enabled the IRS programs, risks creating similar destructive policies in the future. Understanding the inequalities and injustices that First Nations people continue to face is an important part of the decolonization process, however it is essential that we turn our action inward to examine and address the colonial assumptions that continue to inform both the institutions and regulations that dictate our world, but to also address the colonial assumptions that direct our individual thoughts feelings and actions. Any action to "save the Indian" leans on the same colonial benevolence grounded in a racist assumption of white supremacy that drove the creation of residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the

continued over-involvement of the child welfare system in Indigenous families (McKenzie et al., 2016).

Colonial Rescuing Reconciliation and Resurgence

As a response to the genocidal acts of the Indian Residential School legacy, and a persistent call from Indigenous Canadians across the country to address the ongoing colonial injustices, the Canadian federal government has attempted to initiate the process to reform the relationship between Indigenous Canadians and Settlers in what is now widely referred to as reconciliation. Resurgence includes acts of self-determination to re-establish and strengthen a cultural identity, while reconciliation addresses the relationship between the state and the Indigenous people (Mitchell, 2020). Historical relations between Settlers and First Peoples have been widely influenced by the false narrative that the European Settlers know what is best for the First Peoples. This paternalistic benevolence has influenced some of the great Canadian injustices since contact. Reconciliatory actions to mend this relationship must be supported through critical reflection and collaboration to ensure the same good intentions that brought about the residential school programs or the welfare crisis don't re-emerge. This suggests that an approach that promotes Indigenous resurgence might be more suitable for redefining relations. What role is there for a Settler in resurgence-focused reconciliation? Is there an actionable role in for a Settler in Indigenous resurgence, or is requiring a role in helping lending to the same paternalistic benevolence that has limited Indigenous power in the past?

Royal Commission on Aboriginal People

In 1990, the violence experienced by Indigenous children at residential schools was highlighted when the Grand Chief of the Manitoba Assembly of Chiefs, Phil Fontaine, spoke publicly about the abuse he experienced at residential school (Cook, 2018). This put colonial

injustice in the Canadian spotlight and marked a shift towards truth-seeking and change making. Later in 1990 the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) was created to address challenges between Indigenous people and the Canadian government following the Oka crisis (Cook, 2018). The RCAP released a five-volume report on governance, land and economy, social and cultural issues, and the north in 1996 (RCAP, 1996; Cook, 2018). This report consisted of 440 recommendations calling for sweeping changes to the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and between Indigenous people and the governments in Canada (RCAP, 1996).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) is Canada's primary response to the more than twelve thousand abuse claims filed against the federal government because of the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) (Reconciliation Canada, 2015; Cook, 2018). The TRC was established to investigate the experiences of Indigenous children who attended IRSs. The goal of this national inquiry is to repair the damaged Indigenous-Settler relationship through public awareness, and bring legal reparation to those affected (Cook, 2018). The TRC (2015) has identified 94 Calls to Action, outlining the changes in policies require to begin repairing the harm caused by the IRS programs across the country. Included in the Calls to Action is a call to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius* that justified European Sovereignty over Indigenous lands and people. In other words, the TRC aims to rectify the inappropriate European claim to lands based on discovery. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN, 2018, p.2) argues that in response to the Doctrine of Discovery, Canada must "acknowledge that this doctrine has had and continues to have devastating consequences for Indigenous people" and "ensure that the

violation of First Nations' rights to lands, territories and resources that were taken without their free, prior, and informed consent are effectively redressed."

The TRC mandate offers "an opportunity for all Canadians to renew relationships based on a shared understanding of our histories" (Reconciliation Canada, p.1). This suggests that the Settler-Indigenous relationship is at the heart of reconciliation efforts. Bastien (2004) argues that in order for healing to occur, reconciliation must focus on reconnection and reaffirmation of the traditional ways of knowing, and a regeneration of the reciprocal relationship with the natural world. The process of decolonization is the unlearning of harmful Eurocentric ideologies that maintain a power over Indigenous people and communities, to repatriate Indigenous identity and Indigenous ways of knowing (Chung, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The method of decolonization through autoethnography can been simplified as "the courage to be altered" (Chung, 2019). In order to decolonize myself, I engaged in various autoethnographical techniques to bring me to the interface of discomfort in order to evoke a greater understanding my own truth and provoke a change. Grounded in a social constructivist lens, self-reflexivity was applied to my interactions with the Blackfoot culture in order to evoke a greater understanding self, promote transformative actions, and encourage the reader to engage in their own decolonization process.

Methodological history

In order to address reconciliation on an individual level, I aimed to engage in an autoethnography. Reconciliation has often been criticized for being another state-centered solution (Gaertner, 2020), this suggests the use of a relational approach aimed at targeting colonial harm on a individual level may be a useless approach. The autoethnographical process is the systematic analysis of personal experience with the goal of developing a greater understanding of a culture (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Chang, 2008).

The autoethnographical method emerged in the 1990s to provide space in research for a lived experience in response to the dominance of colonial voices and cultural exploitation within social inquiry (Chawla & Atay, 2018; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). The use of this relational methodology acknowledges the researcher as an inextricable component of the research and provides a more transparent approach to understanding culture.

If change or decolonization was comfortable or easy, we would undoubtably live in a very different world. I am approaching decolonization through a counsellor lens, with safety and change being the two most important components to the therapeutic setting. Habits that have

developed over the course of a lifetime are deeply engrained in who we are. With each reinforcement of a behaviour or thought pattern, our brain anatomically adapts producing pathways to behavior. The human capacity to change, to unlearn and relearn is so instrumental to both the counselling process (Sperry, 2022), and to the method of autoethnography, and as Chung (2019) stated, this change requires courage, not shame or guilt. Chung (2019) explained that it is through relational engagement with Indigenous people and culture that this change occurs. As described by Sperry (2022), for a mental health intervention be effective, a counsellor must effect change. Deep change, or transformation in the counselling setting is when someone alters a maladaptive personality pattern to a more adaptive behavioural pattern (Sperry, 2022). This echoes the goal of an autoethnographer to have the courage to change, and in a sense puts me in the position of the changer or client. Interestingly some of the specific strategies for therapeutic intervention serve the same function as many of the methodological tools incorporated into the autoethnographical process. Some examples of this include cognitive restructuring, emotion evocation, reflection and self-exploration, pattern shifting, visualization, behavioural rehearsal (Sperry, 2022).

Methodology of Autoethnography

In response to the colonial violence experienced by Indigenous children in residential schools, and the ongoing oppression of Indigenous people, I engaged in an autoethnography to unlearn the colonial behaviours that have proven harmful. The process of autoethnography is argued to be a useful tool for practitioners, including counsellors who work in a multicultural setting (Chang, 2008). The autoethnographical research has the potential to enhance cultural understanding and build cross-cultural coalitions through immersion of the self in a culture (Chang, 2008; Stanley, 2020). My professional goal is to develop the skills, knowledge, and the

cultural understanding and cultural humility to be able to ethically counsel Indigenous children and families.

Through the process of autoethnography, as a Settler, I began a deconstruction of my colonial identity through a deeper understanding of the historical and contemporary lived experiences of the Blackfoot people. Through this process my thoughts and behaviours were highlighted, I have reflected on and began to alter and to deconstruct the colonial actions that persist within myself as a third generation Settler. This process was done through observations of self and others during my experience working directly with members of the Blackfoot community in the community of Cardston. This includes students and families who take the bus from the Kainai reserve, and students who lived within the community of Cardston. This process reconceptualized the colonial state with the aim of understanding the roots of oppressive behaviours to prevent these behaviours from occurring in the future (Regan, 2010). One of the major critiques of federal reconciliation is the continued oppression of Indigenous populations across the country (Wakeham, 2019), suggesting a role for this process and an importance for change on an individual level.

In response to the colonial ideologies that have influenced me throughout my development, the process of autoethnography was applied in order to decolonize myself and promote action on an individual level. The secondary goal of this project is to influence the reader to initiate their own decolonization process with the hope of propagating an awareness and understanding of continued colonial oppression in order to make space for Indigenous resurgence.

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that systematically analyses personal experience in order to gain knowledge of a cultural experience (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011;

Stanley 2020). The process of autoethnography includes a combination of cultural observation and analysis, with the use of narratives to link the self with the social to create an understanding and evoke change (Chang, 2008). The process of autoethnography is a qualitative approach that links contextual observation to the experience of the self (Ngunjiri, Hernendez, & Chang, 2010). This process involved collecting both observational data of the self and the other and analyzing and interpreting this data in order to identify themes to connect the past to the present.

An evocative autoethnography uses the story of the self to elicit an empathetic response from the reader, enabling the reader a deeper understanding of feelings of the writer (Crawford, 2017). For this project, an evocative autoethnographical approach was applied. I intentionally engaged in self-reflexive thought on the experience of working with Blackfoot families, to transform my own beliefs, attitudes and actions, and elicit an emotional response in both myself and the reader, encouraging their own self-reflexive action or decolonization process (Chang, 2008). Regan (2010) argues that a problem with the traditional methods of approaching or remedying the Settler-Indigenous relations is a preoccupation with the Other, and this preoccupation promotes a harmful saviourism mentality, and prevents us from turning inward. The process of autoethnography forced me to turn inward to address this benevolent paternalism that has undoubtably influenced me throughout my development and urged me to decipher how I came to believe that I know the things I do.

My Theoretical Framework

The first step in the process of autoethnography is to develop a foundational framework from which to approach the autoethnogaphical process. I ground myself in social constructivism adopting the belief that what I have come to believe and value are the result of my subjective reality, and the beliefs and values and attitudes that the individuals I have encountered

throughout this process have a different lived experience that has influenced their beliefs, values, and attitudes.

Consistent with a social constructivist lens, I have adopted a family systems theoretical orientation when it comes to my role as a counsellor. This theory suggests that seemingly maladaptive behaviours may hold an adaptive role and provide a coping mechanism within the greater family system (Langoudi, Bahramizadeh, & Mehri, 2011). Through both a social constructivist lens and from a family system theory perspective the family unit functions as a mediator of identity (Sabatelli & Mazor, 1985), and is integral in understanding how the self came to be and how the self can be transformed to reflect a decolonized state. In my role as a counsellor I adopted the understanding that what the kids I work with have come to know is greatly influenced by the family system, much like what I have come to know has been greatly influenced by my specific role in my family.

Cognitive Dissonance and Change

Values are the individual and collective beliefs that people hold. Our beliefs about what is right and what is wrong are developed over time as we are exposed to patterns and traditions in our subjective realities to create implicit orientations that influence our behaviour (Akpan, Beard, & Notar, 2018). Epistemological change, like the change required to decolonize my thinking is exceptionally difficult. When we learn something that is incongruent with our belief system, we experience cognitive dissonance. When we have two conflicting beliefs, this produces cognitive dissonance. This cognitive dissonance is uncomfortable and often leads people to avoid situations that require them to hold two conflicting beliefs. It is through this discomfort that there is a potential alteration in belief, attitude, or behaviour to produce congruence (Akpan et al., 2018). It is through this clash of realities, that a belief can be reinforced, or a new perspective is

created. The process of autoethnography relies on diving into this discomfort to investigate the dissonance between my beliefs, habits, and attitudes in order to address the colonially harmful, paternalistic values that I have come to hold. One example of the active creation of cognitive dissonance for the purpose of change, is my belief that food should not be wasted. I strongly hold this belief, yet I am repulsed by the thought of eating organ meat, or most meat that doesn't come void of bones and fat. These two beliefs are completely conflicting and produce dissonance. Through self-reflection, cultural observation, and the acquisition of knowledge, the process of autoethnography has forced me to confront any incongruent beliefs and behaviours and metaphorically push me to either eat meat or forgo this belief of what it is to consume meat sustainably.

Regan (2010, p. 23), argues that as individuals, Canadian Settlers must engage in decolonization in order to be "morally and ethically responsible actors in Canadian Society." Unlearning habits is a difficult process. Using a social constructivist's understanding of reality has enabled me to expose myself to contradicting ways of knowing, producing the clash of dissonance required to make great change towards decolonization. This analytical approach to the subjective experience provides a tool for change in the reader. This is more than simply the story of self, but an intentional transition. Highlighting the transformative change experienced throughout the autoethnographical process provides a subjective blueprint for initiating the decolonization process. The autoethnographical process must also engage the reader in a way that evokes emotion, through storytelling in a way that enables the reader to relate to the writer.

Immersion in the Culture

Much of the reflective and observational data collected is the result of interacting with members of the Blackfoot community with the intention of unlearning my colonial attitudes

through awareness, reflection, and response. For this to be successful, a major portion of time was spent directly interacting with members of this culture. Ethnographers historically gain knowledge as participant observers in the culture through directly engaging in cultural activities (Ellis et al., 2011). My engagement with Blackfoot perspectives was facilitated through my role as a student counsellor at the schools in a small community that borders the Kainai reserve. Due to the priority of my role as a counsellor, and the importance that confidentiality and authenticity hold for the counselling process I have made every effort to ensure that my interactions with members of the Blackfoot community do not interfere or exploit the counselling process, and that the data reported is strictly data of self.

My practicum placement involved working with Blackfoot and non-Indigenous children and their families. I worked with students from grades 1-12 from September 2020 to April 2021. Following the completion of my practicum I worked with students from grades 1-8 from April to June as a family school liaison counsellor. During this time, I worked collaboratively with teachers, administrators and community service providers to support the mental health of students from the Blackfoot community living both on and off the reserve, and non-Indigenous students. Part of the immersion into the culture was through communication with members of the Blackfoot community outside of the counselling setting including coworkers and other community members. Data on these communications was collected in the form of self-reflection and observation of self that resulted from informal conversations with members of the Blackfoot community.

Data Generation

The goal of the autoethnography is to produce a personal transformation, in this case a decolonization of personal beliefs. The type of data required to support this transformation is

individual and subjective, however the data must go beyond storytelling, to include a critical analysis of the story as method for action (Chang, 2008). The data collected consisted of memories, or observation about self, feelings about certain interactions, journal entries, and recordings (Ellis et al., 2011). The personalization of the data generation directly reflects the separation of the autoethnography from the generalizable, exploitative structure of other colonially-valued methodologies and leans into the traditionally-valued knowledge transmission through the use of story (Kovach, 2009).

The Use of Self-Narratives

Storytelling is a common practice that holds ancient roots in many human cultures, including Blackfoot culture. The art of storytelling often incorporates an autobiographical component as stories centre around the family, ancestors, and community of the storyteller (Chang, 2008). Chang (2008) argues that all genres of writing either directly or indirectly carry an autobiographical component. For the purpose of this autoethnography, the story of self is described with intentionality and presented as memory and observational data.

The inclusion of self-narratives in this autoethnography is designed to include stories from the past, to investigate their meaning, and to link them to present-day observations about the self and individuals from the Blackfoot culture. The self-narratives included were selected based on their function to provide and support personal insight into the theme of decolonization, and include sociocultural information important for the analysis of the events. The process of writing about events related to the role that societal influence has had on me, has the evoked self-discovery (Chang, 2008), or self-knowledge, and has promoted the process of decolonization.

The self-narrative relies on personal memory which Chang (2008) argues has the potential reveal partial truths, or unreliable data blurred and distorted through time. Despite the

subjectivity and variability of using memory as data, the process of tapping into personal memory and reconstructing the self-narrative has the potential to provide the insight necessary for prompting personal change. The fundamental process of diving into memory with the goal of transformation, parallels the therapeutic method of change through self-discovery within the counselling setting, and the process has been reported to be a therapeutic process for writers and readers (Ellis et al., 2011; Stanley, 2020).

Several therapeutic techniques involve intentionally looking back through memories in order to support change (Stanley, 2020). Collecting self-narrative data is complicated by time. The use of chronicling, inventorying, and visualizing the past self, were all used to develop a greater understanding of the self-narrative (Chang, 2008). Understanding the roots of certain behaviours and beliefs have enabled me to re-examine their weight against contemporary beliefs that I hold. The cognitive dissonance and feelings of discomfort with the presentation of a new and potentially more informed belief, was debated through personal context.

Chronicling. Chronicling is the sequential organizing of memories. Memories salient to the colonial foundations of my belief system were reported and organized using autobiographical timeline of important events (Chang, 2008; Table 3.1). The method of chronicling in the autoethnographical process again mirrors the counselling intervention of breaking goals down into manageable chunks. For the purpose of this autoethnography with the goal of decolonizing the self, it is important that I look back throughout my lifetime to filter memories and events that have contributed to the current self. The significant moments that I have chosen to separate my lifetime into are included in Table 3.1. The exploration of the past self was instrumental in providing evidence in the argument for change. Understanding the events, traditions and attitudes

that have contributed to the value system that I hold, was used to debate the proposed change in belief or attitude that potentially results from the process.

Significant event	Age	Year
Divorce of Parents	0-3	1989 - 1992
Early years	3 - 13	1992-2003
Highschool	13-18	2003-2007
Undergrad	18-22	2007-2012
Edmonton	22-28	2012-2017
Returning home	28-30	2017-2019
Graduate school	30-31	2019-2020
Present day	32	2021

TABLE 3.1. CHRONOLOGICAL TIMELINE.

Inventorying the Self. The process of inventorying the self includes documenting memories of self that function as pieces data, evaluating the thematic importance of each memory, and organizing these memories into categories (Chang, 2008). Chang, (2008) suggests that when inventorying data, to not only organize it based on theme, but also to attach hierarchical meaning to each item, ranking them by importance. She argues that this process demands interpretation and prompts greater reflection. For this autoethnography the overarching theme is the decolonization of myself as a Settler Canadian, and through the analysis of the data themes were established by transferring memory and observational data into a thematic conceptualization.

Visualization of Self. Visualization is another tool that overlaps between the process of autoethnography and several counselling interventions. Visualization is the act of condensing or restructuring informational data into an image (Chang, 2008). The use of visualization and visual displays have enabled me to consume the data in a simplified manner. For the purpose of this

autoethnographical inquiry, I have used a genogram as imagery. Genograms are something that I used frequently in the counselling setting to get a visual understanding of the client's family, and to identify patterns within the family system. A genogram is a graphic representation of a family tree that maps out the relationships the individual has with other members of the family (GenoPro, n.d.). This intervention is consistent with the theoretical framework of social constructivism and applying this to the self-narrative will enable the reader to understand the contextual relationships that are important to me.

External Sources

External data was collected to validate, triangulate or elaborate on memory-based data (Chang, 2008). Some of the external data that has become significant throughout the process of autoethnography include photographs from my past (Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011). Data was also acquired through informal interviews and conversation with others mainly including individuals within my immediate family unit including my brothers, mother and father.

Data from the Present-Day Self

Throughout the time spent immersed in the Blackfoot culture, I have intentionally reflected on my feelings, thoughts and behaviours as they relate to my current experiences. This present-day data is in the form of self-observational data that breaks down how I am feeling and what I am thinking in response to an event as it happens to provide introspective data on the self throughout the process (Chang, 2008).

This real-time observation and reflection of self-collected data when I am interacting directly with members of the Blackfoot community provides a deeper insight into the thoughts and feelings that came up, and in turn provides a rationale and opportunity for change to occur. Data from the present day can also be useful in measuring change that may have begun to occur,

and provides an understanding of the cultural assumptions and biases that have influenced my behaviour and attitudes both in the past and the present.

Self-Observational Data. Self-observational data include information on the context and the response in the writer. This includes information about my actual behaviours, thoughts and emotions as they relate to the cultural context (Chang, 2008). Frequent and systematic observations of self provided insight into the most frequent thoughts, behaviours and emotions, this informed the development of themes. In order to ensure collection of observational data, a log of events, thoughts, behaviours and emotions was kept during the course of the cultural immersion. This information was gathered in a confidential field journal and will highlight patterns that may otherwise go unnoticed. Information collected included the context of the interaction, the person or persons that I was interacting with, the location, and the observation itself. Although the immediacy of the record is important for ensuring the accuracy and validity of the observation, my role as a counsellor was prioritized along with the anonymity of the individuals with whom I am interacting with.

Self-Reflectional Data. Chang (2008) describes self-reflective data as information resulting from introspection, self-analysis, and self-evaluation of who you are. Self-reflective data was generated following the collection of observational data and is included as block quotations like fieldnotes. Self-reflectional analysis was used to develop a firm understanding of the values and beliefs driving the behaviours, thoughts, and emotions. Chang explains that not only should self-reflection function to define personal values, but it should also aim to bring an awareness to cultural membership (Chang, 2008). The self-reflective account of events is an important component to the process. Ellis et al. (2011) argue that instead of telling the story of

self, the goal of the evocative autoethnography is to "show" the reader an intimate angle into the change process.

A culture-gram is a web-like chart used to facilitate an understanding of my social self through self-reflection. The culture-gram as outlined by Chang (2008), is a visual representation of the self as it relates to my various social roles. The process of completing a culture-gram functions to subjectively label my cultural and social affiliations and bring awareness to my social biases that may be influencing a colonial attitude. Much like a genogram, a culture-gram was used to bring about specific self-knowledge. Chang outlines nine diversity dimensions that will be used to evoke self-discovery. I generated my own culture-gram using the same diversity dimension Chang suggests; nationality, language, religion, class, interests, multiple intelligences, profession, gender, race/ethnicity (Chang, 2008). The diversity dimensions dictate a starting point from which subjective self-identifiers can be identified creating a web of cultural identity centered around my primary identities (see Appendix B, Figure 3.1).

Analysis and Interpretation

Analysing and interpreting the data collected is the crux of the autoethnographical process, where fragmented pieces of data collected are developed and transformed into a rational and relatable account the phenomenon being investigated (Chang, 2008). In my case, the phenomenon being understood through autoethnography was the development of colonial thinking that has influenced the development of my current self, and the decolonization of this state. There are a multitude of different approaches to the self-narrative. For the purpose of this decolonization autoethnography, the focus was on the development of narratives as they relate to colonial dominance and decolonization. It is through the interpretation of data that makes an autoethnography distinct from other forms of storytelling. The data acquired through observation

and self-reflection were investigated and connected in order to produce a culturally meaningful explanation. This meaning-making process involved the process of analysing collected data. The data was grouped into categories and connected with the present self to comprehend how my behaviours, thoughts, and emotions have influenced the development of my identity and informed the necessary action to initiate the decolonization process and redefine my identity as a more culturally competent counsellor, better able to support Indigenous children and families.

It is important to note that the process of autoethnography is not linear. This is consistent with an Indigenous way of knowing, making this methodology more culturally sound than other linear approaches of study. The analysis of certain pieces of data prompt the collection of self-reflective data that may have been overlooked or yet to be uncovered. Analysis of autoethnography is the systematic identification of relations between data points, whereas interpretation of data is the presentation of these relationship as meaning (Wolcott, 1994). Chang (2008) argues that in autoethnography the processes of analysis and interpretation are intertwined and often conducted concurrently. The development of meaning may elaborate a connection in data that was not yet analysis as such, or the interpretation of data may evoke self-reflective or self-observational data to present.

The Development of Themes

Frequency of Data. Several strategies outlined by Chang (2008) were applied to the analysis and interpretation of the autoethnographical data collected to develop themes. The frequency of similar data points represented the importance of the topic or context, if an event or thought occurs frequently, this could speak to it being fundamental to my life, while events that occur only once, or for the first time, may indicate a shift in thinking or doing. Recurring data was analyzed for its importance in the development of my colonial identity. Repetition in

behaviour or thoughts provides insight into the formation or habitual thinking and may provide insight into how such patterns could potentially be modified to reflect a less harmful understanding of the world. Alternatively, exceptional occurrences are often life-changing and can provide insight in to how change has occurred in the past (Chang, 2008).

Analysis Inclusion. There is an overwhelming potential for self-observational and self-reflective data and an important component of the data analysis is to determine what data should be included in the data set. Through grouping and rearranging, the data is condensed to include the pieces of information that best contribute to the development of themes related to decolonization. Like with determining the data to include, the lack of data can also be useful for analysis. Not having experienced a certain cultural interaction, or not engaging in specific behaviours may provide useful data for the development of cultural themes. Omitted data can provide insight into the researcher's unfamiliarity or dislike, or devaluation of a certain action or thought, and may bring awareness to the values of the society (Chang, 2008).

Analysis of Relationships with Others. The relationships that I hold and have developed throughout my immersion in the Blackfoot culture were analyzed to illuminate Settler-Indigenous relations that may be propagating colonial harm. Developing a deep understanding of the relationships that I hold with members of the Blackfoot community was an important step in engaging in the transformative action necessary to decolonize the self. Analyzing the individual relationships that I hold with members of the community has enabled me to observe patterns in my interactive behaviour and my thought processes. Chang proposes some questions to guide the analysis of these interactions including; what binds us together, and what is the foundation of this bond (Chang, 2008). When considering the importance placed on the therapeutic alliance it is

critical to ask these relational questions. Inquiring about similarities and differences between myself and the Other may enable a greater understanding of self (Chang, 2008).

Connecting the Past to the Present. The data being collected throughout the autoethnographical process includes data from both my past and my present. Much of the self-observational data is in the form of memories collected through intentional reflection. In order to make meaning of the data, it is important to connect the past with the present. Past behaviours and thoughts are important for inferring a rationale for the actions and thoughts of the present-day self. Linking the past and the present relies on logical reasoning and intuition to develop an understanding of the evolution of my individual identity (Chang, 2008).

Transformative Action

Anti-racist behaviours often fall short of producing social change as they do not connect critical reflection with transformative action; instead, critical reflection produces awareness that brings feelings of denial and guilt without change (Regan, 2010). Changes in colonial attitudes to the point of changes in behaviour can be difficult as they may require a Settler to denounce the privilege that comes with the main-stream colonial attitudes (Regan, 2010). Intentionally engaging in transformative action is an important component of the decolonization process. Self-reflective and self-observational data can be important for determining pervasive colonial attitudes that influence potentially harmful thoughts and behaviours; and, transformative learning is responsible for the change in behaviour going forward.

Transformative learning is the action of shifting how we think. Transformative learning theory argues that when an individual is presented with a disorienting dilemma, or cognitive dissonance between their belief system and exposure to a new and incongruent experience, transformative learning, or a change in schema is possible (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). The goal of

transformative learning in the context of this autoethnography is to shift my frame of reference to initiate a process of decolonization.

CHAPTER 3 RESULTS

Following the generation of observational and reflective data I have identified several themes have been determined to be salient to my decolonization process. These themes were selected based on the frequency that the theme presented in the data, the impact the observational data has had on my personal and professional lives, and the context of the dialogue from where the data emerged. Regan (2010) argues that the engagement in both internal and external dialogue circles regarding the historical and contemporary relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people provides a potential catalyst for change.

The identified themes include:

1. Paternalistic Benevolence: A pervasive identity
2. Power Over: Replaying a historical power differential
3. Shifting from objective knowledge to a subjective way of knowing
4. The Importance of Spiritual Belonging
5. Individualism and recognizing my disconnection
6. The importance of achievement

The themes have emerged through the process of reflection, and observation documented in the chronological inventory and the culture-gram, a visual representation of the components of self (Chang, 2008). Many of these themes are positions or characteristics that have been met with pride throughout my life and are very close to my core identity (Culture-Gram see Appendix B. Figure 3.1). The pride produced by the pursuit of these themes throughout my life is what drives the cognitive dissonance, the emotional discomfort, and the thematic salience of each of these themes as I proceed through the ongoing process of decolonizing my way of thinking, and way of interacting with students in my role as counsellor.

Paternalistic Benevolence

The theme that presented the most frequently and that caused the most cognitive dissonance, or unsettling (Regan, 2010), was the concept of paternalistic benevolence, or acting with the mentality of knowing what is best for someone else. This theme presented itself initially through self-observation, primarily through reflections of feelings and thoughts and to some extend my present-day actions. The theme of paternalistic benevolence was significant due to both the frequency that it was observed and the consistency of this observation. Benevolent behaviour presented itself in data from my early childhood, throughout each significant time period of my development, and into the present day. This theme greatly influences my core identities (See Appendix B. Figure 3.1). The frequency and the pervasiveness of the paternalistic behaviour have prioritized it as the theme most important in the decolonization process.

A Collective Identity

As I learn about the historical and contemporary injustices that Indigenous people within Canada have experienced and continue to experience, my instinctive reactions are denial, justification, and deflection. Throughout my upbringing and my formal education, I have been taught that the Canadian identity is one of peacemaking, heroism and kindness. I learned that Canada was multicultural and accepting, and that this was something to be proud of. This pride is something that has been reinforced throughout my international experiences. The following example is from a recent experience travelling in Peru.

> *While I was backpacking in Peru I met an American, Ben. We met on the first day of a multiday hike around Mount Auzangate. We got along great and continued to travel together throughout my time in Peru. During one morning we were cut off in the streets of Peru by a large crowd that appeared to be protesting the American president Donald Trump. Now that I am reminded of this day, I realize that I am not sure what this crowd was protesting. One of the members of the crowd approached us and asked if we are American. I replied that I was Canadian, and Ben replied that he was also Canadian. I remember being amused by Ben's deception for what seemed to be the avoidance of*

conflict, and I remember feeling pride. I was proud of the collective Canadian identity that was viewed internationally as not American. We carried on with our day.

Benevolence is a critical component to our collective identity as Canadians. Our international presence is paternalistic and benevolent in nature with our foreign policy focused on peacemaking and promoting democracy (Lee, 2011). The collective national identity of heroic peacemakers is constructed through mythmaking. This is an identity that I have spent years honouring with pride, and an identity that has led to the greatest level of cognitive dissonance when engaging in the autoethnographical process of decolonization. How can I both be a proud Canadian and hold an understanding of the historical and contemporary injustices experienced by Indigenous people?

A huge part of what has shaped my identity and understanding of the Canadian identity is my experience with international travel. When I began to travel in my early twenties, this Canadian identity was something that was met with admiration internationally. One of the first places I travelled on my own was to South Africa. I was twenty years old and in retrospect knew very little about the world. In South Africa I was exposed to a culture that was unlike anything that I had experienced, racial segregation was easily observable in many ways even 20 years after the legislated end to Apartheid. While in South Africa I toured Robben Island where I learned about Apartheid and the political prisoners incarcerated on the island, including Nelson Mandela.

While in South Africa I spent the majority of my time working on a rural primate sanctuary outside of Pretoria. As a young twenty-year-old a major highlight of this trip was socializing with the volunteers who came from all over the world. I prioritized drinking wine and socializing with my new-found friends above cultural learning and even above safety at times. When I think about this experience I remember being told that there were white bars and black bars and that as a white woman I was to go to the white bars.

At the time, I think this information was taken in as a novelty as opposed to an atrocity. My trip to South Africa provided me with firsthand experience of what inequality and segregation look like. Reflecting on this experience, it illuminated my awareness to racial disparity. I think of how ignorant I was having spent my entire life living 50 km from Canada's largest reserve needing to fly to South Africa in order to learn about legislated racism.

Following my experience in South Africa, travel became a big part of my identity. I valued learning about the histories of faraway countries and carried proudly the identity of the peaceful friendly Canadian. I have since turned inward and directed much attention towards learning the true history behind the peaceful country that I carried so much pride for. The atrocities of our past are unpleasant and incongruent with the widely acceptive Canadian identity. This incongruence is even greater when we consider the ongoing harms of the continued systemic colonial racism. This dissonance and discomfort are inconsistent with the Canadian peacemaker identity. Regan (2010) argues that as a Settler nation, Canadian society is experiencing a collective identity crisis in response to the exposure of the uncomfortable truths about our past. We are being faced with facts that threaten the identity that we hold so dear, that I hold so dear. How can I continue to be the friendly Canadian who loves to travel, while understanding the historical injustices that have facilitated the prosperity and privilege that enables the luxury of this lifestyle? Transformative change reacting to this self-knowledge might come in the form of an altered international identity. Throughout the autoethnographical process I have shifted my focus on local travel and have developed a greater appreciation for the land closer to me. International travel has also been dissuaded and restricted over the past two years so I think it will be interesting to see how this self-knowledge is applied to any future travel.

Canadian Residential Schools. The theme of a collective Canadian identity was also generated through present-day observations from my counselling practicum. One specific observation collected through my exposure in the counselling setting is a shift in mentality and education of elementary aged children.

> *On orange shirt day I had a student come meet with me after school to express that they were feeling sad. They were sad as a result of learning about the residential school programs. I responded to the student by validating their feelings and agreeing that the Canadian history of the Residential School Program is really sad.*

This conversation promoted a reflection of my own understanding of the Canadian identity and marked an uncomfortable approach towards a change in my beliefs about what it is to be Canadian. The sadness experienced by this child, and subsequently by me was not only an indication that we were both unsettled and engaged in the change process, but also an indication that the collective Canadian identity has the potential to shift. The myth of the peacekeeping Canadian has the potential to be broken. This curriculum-based knowledge brought to light historical information that conflicted with the widely-accepted Canadian Identity of peacemaker, and the emotional reaction and empathy experienced by this non-Indigenous child suggests potential for change. This not only induced reflections of my own formal education, but this also caused a greater awareness of the importance that the elementary curriculum can have in promoting understanding and influencing change.

This observation parallels another discussion I had following the discovery of a mass grave at a former Kamloops residential school when a student expressed not only sadness from the recent discovery, but also uncertainty and wonder if the same loss of life was experienced in the residential schools in the area. This wonder, along with distrust and outage was also reflected in dialogue with my Indigenous co-worker following this discovery. This supports an increased

discomfort I have with the Benevolent Canadian identity. There is a dissonance between benevolence and action that led to the death of so many Indigenous children.

Individual Identity

Along with having a Canadian identity of peacemaker produced through a paternalistic ideology, my individual identity is centered around rescuing others. In Karpman's (1968) Drama Triangle model for behavioural responses to stressful situations, the author identifies three roles that people tend to take on: the persecutor, the victim and the rescuer (L'Abate, 2009). In reflecting on my behaviour and attitudes, when I am in high stress situation, I most frequently lean into the role of rescuer. I have numerous roles within my life that I value, for example sister, daughter and counsellor. In many of these positions, like my Canadian identity, I find myself leaning towards the role of a rescuer. This helping nature re-enacts the paternalistic mentality that influenced the development of residential schools. The frequency that I find myself in the role of helper, and the importance that I place on this role to develop personal meaning speaks to a belief about self and an ideology that constructs certain people as needing help. This desire to support or view of others as requiring help has greatly influenced my decision to enter into a helping profession like counselling. This role also positions me in line with the mythical Canadian identity of peacemaker and helper that has been consistently reinforced throughout my life. Several of the observations made suggest an engagement in paternalistic behaviour in several realms of my life including my current role as a counselling student, my familial roles of daughter and sister, and to some degree, the role I have adopted in previous romantic relationships.

Counsellor Training. With most of the observational data being derived from my role as a school counsellor, I have focused on how a paternalistic attitude may be influencing my

thoughts and actions leading me to enter into this role. There have been several choices and turns in life that have led me to pursue a career in a helping field, even the engagement in a project centered around decolonization is driven by a passion for being able to help others. This helper identity is at the very core of who I am, and it is here where I experience the most cognitive and emotional discomfort when reflecting on the observations of self both leading up to this role, and within this role. This discomfort is also experienced when I think about some of the negative outcomes of engaging in helping behaviour.

When I think back to the first class of my Master's program in Counselling Psychology, one of the first exercises the professor had us do was to pair off and counsel each other through a specific problem that we were currently facing. Again, my instinctive response was to provide my peer with a solution. I was uncomfortable with their emotional experience and my immediate response was to reassure and repair, to come up with some sort of band-aid that would hold until I could remove myself from the unease of their pain. Looking back at this experience I can see how easy it is to treat an emotional wound with advice and saviourism when we ourselves are uncomfortable. Not only is this an easy and natural response, but it is also praised as part of the colonial identity of Canadian peacemaker. Regan (2010) argues that as Settlers, in order to engage in authentic reconciliation, we must address the potential harm that exists in the role of benign peacemaker and challenge ourselves to critically reflect on how we respond to the emotionally uncomfortable history of our country. This is consistent with the way Settlers have historically faced the discomfort that presents when they are faced with the knowledge of a cultural wound. Settlers, uncomfortable with the differences of Indigenous people jumped to quell their unease and rescue the uncivilized Indigenous children from their own culture. Much like training to be a good counsellor, Regan (2010) argues that in order to properly engage in

reconciliation we must deconstruct the identity of saviourism in response to unsettling events. Regan argues that this is the same colonial mentality that promoted the establishment of IRSs and that continues to influence Canadian policy and Indigenous-Settler relations. It has been almost two years since this initiation into counselling training, and this exercise is still one of the most salient lessons. What I learned that day was humility. I learned that I don't know how to fix the problems that my peer was facing, I also learned that jumping to remedy the experience of the other has the potential to cause harm. Through the process of revisiting this introduction to counselling, I can identify similarities in the healing process of counselling, and the necessary historical healing processes that must be engaged in to not only give space for healing, but also to address the harm caused by the knee-jerk reaction to rescue people or repair their problems, that colonial settlers engaged in response to the discomfort presented by the Indigenous non-Christian way of life. Understanding this discomfort with the feelings of others and my tendency to respond with self-derived solutions has informed much of my counselling interactions throughout my practicum. There are numerous examples of moments when I had to fight my instinctive urge to comfort and provide solution for the pain I was observing. This drive to fix problems is so ingrained in me and my tendencies as a counsellor that it is something that will continue to require constant reflection. One example of this need to fix people occurred with a student who came to the counselling office for a conflict with their teacher. The student expressed the teacher was too hard on them, she didn't like them, and during tests the teacher would correct the student aloud causing the student to feel embarrassed. My initial approach to this solution was to "save" this student from the pain the teacher was causing. I immediately advocated for test accommodations to quell the anxiety experienced by this student. I spoke to the teacher, the parents and the principal to advocate on behalf of this student. I was responding

with a paternalistic attitude towards the embarrassment experienced by this student. I was trying to fix her problems through my lens and using my power. Following some significant reflection and consultation I realized that my benevolent intervention was wrong. This student didn't need another white adult to speak on her behalf, she needed me to encourage self-advocacy and support her with skills to approach test taking. Through reflection my discomfort has enabled me to identify when I jump to fixer role. This paternalistic attitude is something that impacts my everyday world as a counsellor. It is uncomfortable to acknowledge how close to the core of my being is this paternalistic attitude towards helping others.

This paternalistic behaviour is also something that upon reflection I exhibit in my personal life as well. Reflecting on the life events that have most greatly impacted my decision to enter a helping profession in my current role as a counsellor, I have identified numerous moments from a very early age where I have engaged in this paternalistic behaviour. Many of the salient memories and observations involve my relationship with my younger brother, Noah. Being his older sister, I have always taken on a role of carer. This is potentially the result of natural sibling birth order, the fact that I am the only female sibling, and the mediating role that I adopted following the divorce of my parents. When Noah was younger, he struggled with suicidality. He shared with me that he was having thoughts of killing himself and in response I did everything I could to control his ability to kill himself. I moved in with him and overwhelmed him with what I considered "support." My paternalistic behaviour did not fix or help what my brother was experiencing but instead served to alleviate my discomfort with his pain. My brother has since been able to express how disempowering and burdensome this made him feel. In an attempt to "save my brother from himself" I caused harm. When I reflect on this need to help I am drawn to think of my family dynamic. As a family system's approach would

suggests, my need to help my brother among others seems to be something that I learned in early childhood. My parents were divorced when I was very a very young child and they maintain a very conflicted relationship to this day. My brothers have also had a very tumultuous relationship with each other for as long as I can remember. I believe that my drive to support or help was a behaviour adopted very early in life to mediate the conflict within my immediate family.

This paternalistic attitude is the same attitude that settlers used to justify the implementation and enforcement of Indian Residential School programs across the country. The application and potentially the origin of the attitude and behaviour may be different but in both cases the behaviour mediates harm through "helping." The IRS programs are often referred to a dark chapter in Canadian history. For me this paternalistic benevolence is more than just a chapter. This attitude is at the core of my identity and has influenced my development and behaviour at almost every turn. In order to legitimately work towards a decolonization of self, I must continue to lean in to the discomfort that it brings to acknowledge and investigate the harmful nature of the paternalistic ideas, attitudes and actions that have been so instrumental in providing me with personal meaning throughout my life. Overcoming the systemic issues of power and coloniality that can decolonize research requires leaning into the discomfort of engaging in epistemic discomfort in order to grow (Anthony-Stevens & Matsaw, 2019). In order to grow into a great counsellor and continue to work towards a decolonized identity I will need to continue to reflect on much of the helping behaviour that I engage in both in my professional and my personal life.

Power Over: Replaying a historical power differential

A significant theme that has been identified through the course of the autoethnographical process is the theme of power and privilege. This theme is closely tied to the theme of

paternalistic benevolence as the idea of acting in the best interest of someone else often coincides with a power differential justifying the paternalistic behaviour and limiting the resistance to the benevolence action. Understanding and mediating the power dynamic is an important component to the counselling setting. This power dynamic is complicated by the historical relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and complicated further by the historical relationship between Indigenous families and the institute of formal education. As a non-Indigenous counsellor working in an elementary school with Indigenous children it is necessary that I critically examine the power dynamic within the counselling setting in order to evoke change towards a decolonization of self.

"Are you Racist?"

One of the most overt opportunities for reflection during my experience as a student counsellor was when a young student asked me directly if I was racist. This was a student who I had met with before, but who I was still focused on developing rapport. The student was an Indigenous child who had been adopted into a non-Indigenous family after losing a parent to early death, and another parent to incarceration.

> *A snowstorm had begun and the cars outside the counselling office and out front began to collect snow. Liam[2] began asking questions about me, which is often the case when beginning to develop a trusting therapeutic alliance. Liam asked me which car was mine and if I could see his family's vehicle as he described it. I answered by stating that all the cars had turned white. He responded with "what are you, racist?" It is not uncommon that students in the counselling setting will test you, but this was different, not in his intent, but in the response it evoked in me. This question took me off-guard and immediately initiated discomfort and a defensive response. Of course, I am not racist. Of course, I am not racist? Am I racist? Before I could even process what was said, and what feelings were behind Liam's question, I responded by explaining and defending my words. I wasn't racist, I was merely explaining that I could no longer tell what colors the cars were because it had snowed so much. Liam followed this up with a casual "I know, I'm just joking." I responded out of fear for being viewed as a racist, and in retrospect I could have better used this opportunity to build relationship with the student. In this*

[2] All names used are pseudonyms

moment the session became about me, my discomfort, and my need to defend myself. Everything in me wanted to respond by screaming that I am not a racist.

This event reflects my core belief about self and about right and wrong. Racism is bad and I am good, I couldn't be racist. This concept reinforces the myth of the benevolent Canadian identity. It is also interesting that it is easier and more comfortable to see the need for change in the Canadian peacemaking identity than to imagine my core belief about my own identity as a non-racist. It is more comfortable to blame or see fault in my group identity than it is in something so core to my individual identity.

Cowboys and Indians. During my counselling practicum, there was a display on one of the bulletin boards where the accomplishments Blackfoot people from southern Alberta were highlighted. Among the recognized individuals was a man who had been my childhood friend when I was a young girl.

Julian was my friend, we played together with my brothers and his sister, while our mothers visited. As my mother recalls, our mothers were good friends who volunteered together. One day Julian was over at our house playing. They abruptly left and I did not see him again until my first day of high school and there he was. I asked my mother about him, and she then explained to me that the reason we stopped being friends is because of something that had happened during our play had made his mother believe that we were racist. Upon further investigation my mother explained that as a child I had demanded that he role-play the Indian in our game of cowboys and Indians. At this point his mom became upset and stopped all communication with my mother.

This is not something that I remember, and it did not feel good to learn that it was my behaviour that had caused harm and ended our mothers' friendship. This realization left me feeling shameful and defensive, again. How old are you when you need to take responsibility for your actions? How old was I? Was I racist? Am I racist? What I had done had obviously caused harm and this made me uncomfortable. My response to my discomfort and shame was complete avoidance. I was afraid to confront my fear of being deemed a racist, so I avoided interacting

with him. My childhood friendship wasn't something that I discussed with my friends. He was evidence that contradicted a personal and collective identity that I had come to be proud of. This fear-based response of specifically avoiding interacting with this boy parallels the Settler's role in the historical interactions with Indigenous people.

I re-engaged in the same game of cowboys and Indians that led to the destruction my mother's friendship several years later in the form of a Cowboys and Indians themed grad party. During the last week of high school the graduating class would get dressed up in different themed wear and celebrate graduating, mostly by drinking at someone's house dressed in various garb. In reflecting upon my experience that evening, I remember being very concerned with which boys were going to be there, which friend was driving and where we would sleep. I also remember being concerned with what I was going to wear but this was limited to worrying about how I would look and not the appropriateness of wearing a costume designed to denigrate the historical conflict between Settlers and First People. As I recount this event, I feel it's necessary to explain myself by stating that I ended up dressing like a cowboy. This desire to defend my identity again speaks to how uncomfortable it is to acknowledge past err when it comes to appropriation and racism. This event speaks to how normalized and systemic racism is in Canada, and to the challenges in genuine reconciliation. When I reflect on this event, it is uncomfortable. I attended this party when I was 18. I was no longer a child acting based on stereotypes, I was an adult acting out of a desire to be liked and a desire to fit in. This doesn't make my actions less hurtful and contributes to the continued disconnect between Settlers and Indigenous people and perpetuates negative stereotypes. My actions caused harm and even as an adult I prioritized my own experience above the pain of others. Taking social constructivist perspective, I can identify that continuing to grow up in a Southern Albertan environment

enabled the same behaviour at 18 as it did as a child. My constructed reality and understanding of the Settler-Indigenous relations had not changed. In 2007 when I graduated and attended this grad party, there was no backlash. We all got in trouble, but this was for drinking, not for appropriating a culture that has historically been oppressed.

Both the "Cowboys and Indians" grad party, and the game of "Cowboys and Indians" that I engaged in as a young child, cause me to wonder what my response would be to someone else engaging in these behaviours. One of the groups of high school students that I worked with as a counsellor were discussing something that happened in gym class. They were explaining that the students were given the freedom to choose their own teams for basketball, and that this resulted in an all Indigenous team and an all non-Indigenous team. This group-oriented behaviour was not central to what the youth were talking about, but in reflecting made me question the influence this segregation could potentially have on members of each group. Would establishing teams like this empower individual choice? Limit forced integration? Promote conflict?

Resurgence.

During my practicum placement the school implemented several COVID-19 safety protocols including a cohort system designed to reduce the number of students each individual interacted with for the sake of limiting the potential spread of COVID-19. Students were broken down into cohorts and required to enter the building through specific cohort doors, use specific bathrooms, and stay in specific zones throughout the day including at recess.

> *One student was referred to my office after expressing that he did not want to stay in his zone. He wanted to cross the zone and interact with his friends in a different cohort. When he was asked to stay in his zone he refused and walked over to his friends. He was sent to the office and broke down in tears. This is when he was referred to come speak to me. Upon speaking to this student, he expressed that he felt disconnected from his friends*

and that the cohort system had isolated him from his preferred peers. After reaching out to his parents following this conversation, his mother expressed that she felt his defiance was indicative of a larger distrust in the school system as a whole. She explained that in their household there was an importance placed on standing up against a school system that had historically engaged in cultural genocide. She was passionate that his act of defiance be viewed as an important moment of re-establishing identity through standing up against the school law.

I have met several parents who defend the actions of their children, who feel like their children are being wrongfully blamed or were given inappropriate consequences by the school. This student was different. This student was not typically in the office in trouble, he was not commonly involved in playground conflict. This act of defiance was intentional and led to a genuine emotional response. This situation left me confused about how to support this student while working within the structure of the colonially-influenced school system with a unique COVID-19 cohort system mandated by the colonially-influenced government. This situation made me question my ability to support this student. Should I be working with this student to explore and empower this part of his identity? Should I refer him to an Indigenous counsellor who could better understand his experience? Should I advocate for him? It is interesting that my knee-jerk reaction is to advocate for this student, to "help" him be understood to the authorities. When I think about this instinctive reaction to "help" this student out of his predicament, I find myself echoing the mission of the residential school programs of removing children from the harm of their home environment. This incident highlighted the ongoing power struggle between colonial structure and Indigenous self-determination.

It was important that I didn't use my position of power to advocate on behalf of this student. His actions and words of defiance were important to him, and to his family. Through a conversation with this student's mother I realized the importance of power in this interaction, I also realized the difficultly in distancing myself from the colonial institution enforcing the rule.

In the end, I ended up working with the student to facilitate connection to his peers within the restraints of the cohort system. I met with the student a couple times, he appreciated the times that connection had been facilitated with his peers but it became clear that this student did not trust me. Ultimately, I ended up referring the student to the Indigenous counsellor. This situation really made me think about how I can support Indigenous students within the school system, an institution with such a complicated history – a complicated history that is further complicated by colonially-inspired changes to the curriculum. My interaction with this student and family was very brief but has really forced major self-reflection. In this circumstance I was able to have a conversation with his parent about their distrust in the school. This made me think about all the parents and students who I did not have the opportunity to meet, possibly because of this distrust. Is aligning myself with a school influencing my trustworthiness as a counsellor to Indigenous students?

Independence and Individualistic Mentality

When I think about my identity it is hard to conceptualize who I am without addressing the theme of independence. This is a part of my identity that in the past I have met with a sense of pride. A large part of my position in my practicum placement is connecting families to greater supports within the community or extended family supports. The process of reaching out to supports outside of the immediate family is something that was initially daunting, but over time, it became a very useful way to support the Indigenous students that I worked with. Throughout the process of reflection and exposure to a culture that is community focused, I have started to question the origin and the outcome of valuing independence so highly. The act of reaching out and asking for help or looking for connection countered my core identity of help provider. I

prioritized self-sufficiency and my helper identity above interconnectedness and my own wellbeing.

The sociocultural themes of individualism, collectivism and interdependence are traditionally valued differently in different cultures (Blu Wakpa, 2016). My identity is developed around an individualistic orientation that is a common mode of socialization in western cultures (Cheah & Chirkov, 2008). An individualistic cultural orientation values the self as an independent entity that is separate from others with individual agency to exert control (Cheah & Chirkov, 2008). This individualistic mentally differs significantly from the traditional values of the Blackfoot people that include the interconnectedness of the individual with land and kin. Interdependence is an integral part of the traditional way of knowing (Bastien, 2004, Blu Wakpa, 2016).

Throughout the process of working with Blackfoot families, the importance placed on relationship is something that I have come to admire, and something that has made me question the value I place on agency and autonomy above a greater community, and above even the close familial ties that I hold. The importance of community is something that I have also observed in my friends from different cultural regions, mainly those in the Middle East. This focus on community is observed in the form of ceremony and tradition. For example, one of my friends from Egypt explained to me the process of supporting a community member following the death of a loved one. The cultural expectation is that a family member provides support in the form of gifts to the family of the community member to represents their family, regardless of the relationship. Through reflection of my own lived-experience I have identified a lack of ceremony and lending to a weak link to my community, and an exaggerated importance placed on independence. Throughout the process of reflecting, I have identified incongruence with what I

have come to know as important, community and togetherness, and what I have built my life around believing, that I have the agency to go it alone. This has driven me to think about the importance of community and how I can strengthen the community that I have and how I can create a strong community for myself and for any children I might have in the future. The development of connection rooted in a close community does spark a bit of discomfort. When I think about the things that I am proud of, many if not all involve my love for adventure, and novel environments. To build roots is to act against the independent traveller that I have come to be proud of. Another memory to re-evaluate the importance I place on independence over community and family is an experience I had while travelling to the Middle East.

> *When I initially landed in Dubai I took a taxi to my hotel. I was travelling alone. I will never forget the conversation I had with this taxi driver. Initially he wanted to know where my husband was and how he could let me travel alone, once I explained that I did not have a husband he expressed his shock that my parents would allow me to travel alone. Initially this conversation made me angry. I was in my twenties and had been living on my own for years.*

It is only now that I am able to step back and revisit this event with empathy for his cultural orientation and see the potential benefits in placing a greater importance on family and community. The colonial Eurocentric mentality of developing independence as soon as possible fails to promote a reliance on the greater family and the community. This mentality has driven individualistic behaviour that I once thought made me tough. When I reflect, I can visualize how much of my core identity has developed around the concept of being autonomous and self-sufficient. Within my Eurocentric world I have come to be driven to not need support. This is also observed in people holding a more individualistic ideology in the less effective support networks and more support-avoidant behavior complicated mental health interventions like counselling (Scott, 2011).

As a counselor, there is a great emphasis placed on identifying an individual's support system and community resources. The ability to seek help and receive help are instrumental in the success of many clients, yet in my own personal life, and within my core identity is someone who is driven to need no one. The idea of helping heal both as a support and through the development and strengthening of other supports conflicts with my drive to not need anyone. This incongruence is uncomfortable and when I think about the value of community it induces feelings of loneliness and envy.

The importance of spiritual belonging

An important theme that has been generated throughout the autoethnographical process is my lack of spiritual understanding and belonging. This is something that is linked to the value I have placed on objectivity and knowledge that is supported by empirical evidence. This lack of spirituality is an example of where community and relational importance is missing from my current life, and an area that requires focus in order to develop a greater congruence with the importance of relationship with a community. This also prompts an important reflection on the incongruence between my individualistic nature and my political position regarding the importance of social supports and community health and further suggests that I should develop a mechanism to lean into a more collectivist point of view. I was raised in a very non-spiritual household. My only firsthand experience with organized religion was when I would go to youth group with my friends, or when my grandmother would come to visit, and she would take us to Catholic mass with her. When she did this my mother would belittle the concept. Even as a young child I knew exactly how much my mother resented the church and as I grew up, I came to hold the same belief that organized religion was perpetuated lies and that energy and power only exist if they can be empirically evidenced.

Quinn (2020) argues that at the core of Indigenous identity is spirituality. Traditional teachings view identity as comprising of four elements including, the physical self, self perception or the mental self, feeling about the self or the emotional self, and a spiritual self which is the component of identity that enables someone to engage in actualization (Quinn, 2020). This traditional concept of identity development dictates that without development of a spiritual self, self-actualization or true identity development cannot be fully supported. This suggests that to genuinely address and deconstruct the colonial identity, I must address this underdeveloped element of my identity.

Shifting from objective knowledge to a subjective way of knowing

Much like how the postmodern era prompted a change in the way culture was studied with the incorporation of autoethnographical methodology (Ellis et al., 2011), I underwent my own transition toward an acceptance of subjectivity in research. My post-secondary journey has transitioned from biological sciences to a more subjective qualitative approach to knowledge seeking. My research interests have also significantly shifted from an interest in understanding and manipulating a neurochemical pathway in the brain, to developing a greater understanding of Indigenous history and health. This growth through transition is a process that began years ago but has continued with intentionality and direction following the initiation into an autoethnography.

The Importance of Achievement

When I reflect on my academic decision-making several the themes that emerge include the benevolence or working towards a helping profession and achievement or successfully completing something that required a lot of effort or skill. I think that a major driving force in my pursuit of higher education was the understanding that this would make me viewed to others

as a successful person. I needed external validation to feel that I had achieved something important. The intrinsic drive to develop a skill and find meaningful employment was drowned out by my need to make those around me proud, mainly my mother.

When I was in high school, schoolwork came easy. Although I was disorganized and had a hard time completing take-home assignments, I excelled at tests. When I finished high school, I enrolled in the emergency medical responder (EMR) program at the Lethbridge College. This was congruent with my belief that I wanted to enter a career saving people. The value placed on saving people is something that I have carried with me since my early childhood. It is through this reflection that I have come to realize that when my parents separated, I found meaning in feeling needed. The separation carved out new roles within my family system. I became valued for my ability to care for my brothers and for my willingness to travel back and forth to and meet the emotional needs of the adults in my life. I developed a value for caring for others and this role had been continuously reinforced throughout my childhood. I wanted to care for others and this value is what led me to enter into the EMR program.

I wanted to become a paramedic, and this was the first step. The EMR program was offered as a part-time program that ran in the evenings, during the days I enrolled as an open studies student at the University and took some courses in psychology and neuroscience. I realized that I liked university, I liked the brain and wanted to know more about how human behaviour could be understood on a cellular level. This produced a significant amount of cognitive dissonance and demanded that I chose between the life-saving occupation that I spent my whole life valuing, and this new interest in the neuroscience behind human behaviour. After completing my EMR, I completed a degree in neuroscience shifting my belief about what meaningful employment looks like. This change was brought about by leaning into what I did

not know to the point of conflict with my longstanding career goal, producing a cognitive dissonance between what I thought I wanted, and what I was genuinely interested in.

Edmonton.

It was in completing my degree in neuroscience that I fell in love with the scientific process. It seemed like everything could be isolated and experimented on and measured against a control group to produce an objective, replicable and generalizable result, a real finding. In the pursuit of scientific knowledge, and I think to a greater extent the pursuit of achievement, I moved to Edmonton to complete a Master's degree in medical genetics. I investigated how the manipulation of the genome can alter the physical and molecular behaviour in a mouse model. In the lab, objectivity and spiritual sterility were encouraged and my lack of spiritual understanding was met with acceptance. This fueled my individualistic mentality and justified my lack of spiritual community.

In contrast to my unwavering belief that knowledge was gained through experimental techniques, Indigenous traditional philosophy includes the ideas that everything is animate and consists of interrelated energy waves (Little Bear, 2012). Indigenous science integrates a spiritual orientation, and knowledge keepers and elders are relied upon to hold and transmit essential knowledges to younger generations (Little Bear, 2012).

Scientific Disillusionment. My experience in Edmonton was centered around completing my degree. I had packed everything that I owned into boxes and moved to Edmonton to continue my journey to becoming a scientist.

> *I arrived in the lab in Edmonton in September 2012. I had signed up to complete a Master of Science and was eager to contribute to the genetic salvation of a neurodivergent disorder. I was driven to save people from their state much like I valued the idea of working as a paramedic and saving people from their predicaments. I was entering the lab at the same time another grad student was leaving. She had successfully*

defended her thesis and was in the process of cleaning out her lab bench so that I would have a workspace. She turned to me and explained that she was disillusioned by what her masters could bring. This was one of the only conversations that I had had with her, but it was one of the most salient memories when I think about my own journey through the scientific method and out into the real world.

When I reflect upon this transition from a young girl who wanted to become a paramedic in order to save people, to a lab bench scientist removed from people I know understand how the external motivations to achieve overcame my drive to help or save people. This does make me want to explore where the desire to save people came from. This is a role that I find myself driven to in both my personal and professional lives. Even in my dreams I adopt the role of a heroine and find meaning out of this role. In my childhood I valued being needed by all of my family members. Looking back, I feel like my need to be needed and to care for those around me including the adults in my world was constructed around the discord that was brought on by parental separation. This need to please others demonstrates a fawning response, or conflict avoidance through people pleasing (Owca, 2020). I have carried this stress response forward into adulthood and have develop a sense or meaning and importance in being about to help others. This rescuer/fawner response has influenced much of who I have become in the name of benevolence. It has become important to me to be able to help, and I think at times that has blinded me to the potential harms of my help.

From mice to humans. Following the completion of my Master of Science I started looking for a job, and some space from both science and academia. This led me to enter into a position of Support Worker working with children and youth with disabilities. This forever changed the course of my life. In this role I found myself leaning back into the position of helper which I found to be more congruent with my personality than was experimenting on mice. I found that in this role I felt more comfortable and confident with myself. I quickly was given

more responsibility and began to coordinate different programs within the agency. Following this initial experience working with children and families I found myself seeking more opportunities to provide various levels of support or care to vulnerable youth. This eventually led me to work in a secured treatment facility working primarily with Indigenous youth. This secured services setting was the place where children and youth ended up when it was decided by caseworkers and judges, that they were unable to keep themselves safe. This was my first real exposure to temporary and permanent guardianship orders and what it meant for a youth to be removed from their home for the sake of their own safety. The right to freedom of these youth was temporarily revoked by caseworker and government official in order to keep them safe. Their power and autonomy were removed through court order in their best interest. This paralleled my own desire to help those who people assume can't help themselves. Is it paternalistic to lock youth up to save them from themselves? Does this in fact promote their wellbeing or simply ensure their survival until the age of maturity? This role highlighted my strengths and weaknesses in the field and provided the rationale for entering the counselling psychology program where I could evolve into a helper through listening and enabling self-efficacy and empowerment as opposed to a helper in a role where power and trust are revoked in the name of safety, and to some extent government liability.

CHAPTER 4 DISCUSSION

I began the autoethnographical investigation with the intention of growing into a culturally competent counsellor equipped to better support the Indigenous youth and families in my current role as a school counsellor and my future practice. The process of reflection has illuminated foundational limitations in my identity that must be actively countered in order to ethically provide counselling supports to Indigenous families. The autoethnographical process has enabled a greater understanding of self, it has provided evidence to support and rationalize how I came to be the person that I currently am and how I came to hold the beliefs that I do. The process has also driven an acknowledgement of how these parts of self can respond to the specific context of counselling Indigenous families. The autoethnographical process has an interestingly likeness to the counselling process, or what the counselling process aims to achieve.

The acquisition of self-knowledge is a useful step in enabling individual change and the necessary growth towards a decolonized state. The same idea was applied to the autoethnographical process with the goal of understanding the myself in the familial, geographical and professional contexts from where I came. This self-knowledge has the potential to finetune my trajectory to where I want to see myself in my personal life, and help define the theoretical framework that I will need to continue to ground myself in as I continue to develop professionally. This will inform the counselling training that I will continue to pursue. In the context of this specific autoethnography, my desired role is that of a counsellor with the cultural competency to counsel Indigenous children and families. Reflecting on the themes developed in the analysis and how they have influenced certain decisions has provided great insight into what has fueled my current belief system, and what can be done to redesign this colonial-inspired way of knowing to begin to reflect a more decolonized perspective.

The Rescuer/Saviour

Throughout this process, my own tendency to act and think and feel with paternalistic benevolence was the most significant theme that came up consistently throughout the timeline of my life. When reflecting on my instinctive responses in times of conflict or stress, I find myself entering Karpman's (1968) drama triangle as a rescuer (L'Abate, 2009). This tendency exists in both my personal life and my professional life and was developed in my early childhood. Essential to Family Systems theory is the concept of early schema formation (Langroudi, 2011). Langroudi (2011) identifies 18 early maladaptive schemas (EMS) that form throughout development and that these EMSs can be grouped into five domains, including an excessive focus on the needs of others at the expense of one's own personal needs. The EMSs in this category include self-sacrifice, subjugation, and approval seeking (Langroudi, 2011). These helper schemas are formed early in childhood and influence the characterological problems and anxieties. Understanding the presence of a maladaptive helper schema is a useful first step towards altering the paternalistic behaviours I exhibit.

It is this rescuer tendency that contributed, if not drove the shift into a helping profession. It is my tendency to rescue that influenced my fixation on saving others throughout my early life, and provided meaning in being needed to those close to me. The reflection process was useful in highlighting the events in my career and in my life that have seen the adoption of a rescuer stance, this awareness is a vital step towards change, but an instrumental component of the autoethnographical process is to engage in transformative action. I have exposed myself to the rescuer disposition and to the events throughout my development that have encouraged and reinforced this state, but this knowledge must now be applied to alter the habitual behaviour of my past and alter my future action. I must learn from the process and move forward in an

informed direction away from the benevolent helper. I have identified the how this self came to be, and developed an understanding of the past harms produced through this pattern of behaviour, and the potential future harms of continuing to engage in this habitual behaviour. The goal of transformative action is to now act in a way to deter the future self from re-enacting the harms of my past, in this case, to stop acting as a rescuer, or to acknowledge this role and shift my rescuer behaviour from fixing to a more supportive and empowering position.

The rescuer tendency is something that I can reflect on in my personal life. I wonder how much of Canadian reconciliation and legislative behaviour is influenced by a similar tendency. Indigenous-Settler relations have historically been influenced by a rescuer mentality applied to justify harmful actions like the IRS program. These good intentions have paved the road to intergenerational harm.

Throughout the process of reflecting on my personal behaviours and exploring the thoughts and feelings that provoked such action, I have developed a hyperawareness of the rescuer tendency, I have discovered that under pressure my default is to rescue. This self-awareness has already impacted my personal and professional lives. This benevolent tendency to rescue is apparent when students present to the counselling office with worries about school work or friends or difficult situations. I have realized that my instinct is to rescue, to remove or limit the exposure to cause of the worry. For example, I recently had a student come in to my office upset about a peer interaction. She wanted to call home and leave school. I enabled her avoidance. I let her call home and leave school essentially rescuing her from her worries. This moment was an opportunity for me to explore her worries, to help empower her and promote self-efficacy, but my rescuer tendency took over and I enabled avoidant behaviour. Reflecting on this recent event I realize how close to the core of my being this paternalistic benevolence lies.

This example also speaks to how complicated the process of decolonization is. Progress is slow, but I am able to identify several moments where the insight derived from this autoethnography have had a transformative effect on my behaviour and provided me the opportunity to grow as a counsellor.

Paternalistic benevolence is not only present in my reflections and observations of self, but also argued to be the rationale for the many of the historical legislative injustices inflicted on Indigenous people (Regan, 2010). Reflecting on my own actions, thoughts and emotional reactions, it is necessary to ask myself how I differ from the benevolent policy-makers that developed the Indian Act and enforced the residential school program. These questions are something that I will need to revisit frequently as I continue into the counselling profession. It is also important to ask myself if my actions are centered in colonialism and if these actions have the potential to lend to harmful outcomes or propagate colonial beliefs and attitudes towards Indigenous people. This process has prompted more questions than answers. As I move forward in my career it is important that I reflect on the nature of my benevolent actions and consult with Indigenous mental health workers in order to practice and learn when benevolent action may be harmful.

In my personal life, my relationship with my brother has greatly been impacted by the knowledge-of-self produced throughout the autoethnographical process. Understanding that rescuing or acting in a paternalistic manner has the potential to cause great harm. Much like the Indigenous-Settler relations throughout Canada have been negatively impacted by the drive to save the Indian from himself, my drive to protect my brother has negatively impacted our relationship. Understanding that the rescuer or saviour role carries with it a power over the target of the aide. By engaging in rescuing or benevolent behaviour, I have indirectly assigned my

brother the role of the helpless. By enabling the student to escape her worries and go home, I have removed her power, much like how the implementation of Canadian IRS programs aimed to save Indigenous children, Canadian settlers have established a state of helplessness (Barnes & Josefowitz, 2019).

Moving forward I must remind myself that there is nothing kind or benevolent about removing someone's power in the name of helping. I must continue to practice sitting with my discomfort as it presents around someone else's worries and acknowledge the potential harm in defaulting to my rescuer tendencies. This provokes reflection on the historic Indigenous-Settler relations and the contemporary approach to reconciliation. This self-awareness promotes an empathetic understanding to the Canadian policy-makers' history of acting under the false assumptions that Indigenous people are incapable of governing themselves (RCAP, 1996), and highlights the potential for harm when acting to remedy social disparities. Understanding that in my role as a counsellor, the student asking to go home was trying to avoid her worries. Facilitating this may have alleviated her immediate anxiety but removed her power and self-efficacy to face similar challenges in the future.

Counselling

When I reflect on my experience counselling Indigenous families I have realized the importance of understanding come of the cultural limitations that may be present: holding a Eurocentric view of mental health, adopting a Western approach to counselling, and identifying as a counsellor of European descent. There are several cultural limitations to the modern approach to counselling. For example, standard suicide interventions and prevention programs have demonstrated to be discordant with Indigenous paradigms and ineffective at preventing suicide in Indigenous youth (Barker et al. 2017). A cultural disconnect between the Indigenous

identity and Western intervention has been suggested to be the reasons therapeutic interventions have been unsuccessful in this population (Barker et al., 2017). Barker et al. (2017) explain that beyond cultural competency, the application of culture can be used as an effective therapeutic tool for Indigenous youth and families. The use of culture as therapeutic intervention aligns with the Indigenous way of knowing prioritizing interconnectedness and community wellness, and has been demonstrated promise as an effective treatment approach for substance-use and suicide prevention (Barker et al., 2017).

Many of the students that I worked with expressed or shared concerns regarding loss of identity. Students had been interracially adopted or relocated from their families on the reserve to live with relatives in town. The incongruence between traditional Indigenous identity and the colonially-enforced Indigenous identity is a counselling concern that demands an approach that incorporates a great understanding of the Indigenous identity. During my counselling placement I was fortunate enough to work alongside an Indigenous counsellor. This allowed me to consult his expertise when I felt I was unable to meet the cultural demands of the client. Working alongside him and learning from his culturally-informed approach was an instrumental start to my own journey towards cultural competence. This also allowed me to refer students to him should I feel my cultural location was inappropriate for their therapeutic success. When I reflect on my experience, having an Indigenous co-worker helped me confidently provide support to some of the students and families who are members of the Blackfoot community. It highlights the importance of making culturally appropriate community connections going forward in my role as a counsellor.

Western interventions that prioritize change on an individual level are in discord with the treatment needs of Indigenous people (Barker et al., 2017). It is important that if I am to become

culturally competent and work with Indigenous families, I continue to learn about Indigenous beliefs, values, and practices. The overarching aim is to provide counseling services from an integrated framework that combines knowledge on Indigenous concepts of healing, and a family systems framework. The limited exposure I have to Indigenous knowledge systems further elucidates my limitations as a non-Indigenous counsellor, and suggests a role for the promotion of more culture-based therapies for Indigenous students. There are an increasing number of culture-based therapies, however, in reflecting on my role and position, I found that these resources were limited and referring to Indigenous culture-based therapies were able to replace the counselling services.

Reflecting on my cultural limits, has enabled me to approach counselling with more cultural humility (Greene-Moton, 2020). The importance I place on achievement must be put aside when identifying if I am a suitable counsellor for each student and family, or if with all my good intention, I may cause more harm than help. The importance places on achievement also speaks to the potential early maladaptive schema of approval seeking (Langroudi, 2011). This suggests that redefining personal achievement might be necessary to enable the cultural growth necessary to become a truly culturally competent counsellor. It is important to acknowledge the potential harm in inappropriate interventions, and prepare myself to refer students when I am not a good fit. This is something as a new counsellor that I have found very difficult. My ego and self-esteem are driven by my ability to provide support. I have had to redefine success and constantly set aside my biases, ignore my personal understanding of mental wellbeing, and seek more appropriate supports when my approach falls short.

The reasons that students are referred for counselling supports focus on a Eurocentric conceptualization of mental health and wellbeing (Fellner, 2018; Stewart, 2008). Indigenous

perspectives of mental health, and the type of interventions that are considered appropriate and effective are fundamentally different than that of the non-Indigenous framework of the Canadian healthcare system (King, Smith, & Gracey, 2009). This is complicated in a school setting where it is primarily non-Indigenous administrators and teachers referring Indigenous students for counselling supports. The colonial view of the 'Indigenous mental health crisis' is conceptualized by a Eurocentric normality. This has the potential to perpetuate colonial harm and assimilation through the application of interventions that are ineffective and potentially harmful for a vulnerable population (Fellner, 2018). This Eurocentric application of support mirrors the Eurocentric understanding of education and welfare that have justified the implementation of IRS programs and the continued removal of Indigenous children from their families. This Eurocentric understanding of mental health is something that I have learned through formal education and through the numerous training sessions I have taken over the years. This conceptualization of mental health is also reinforced throughout my employment as the great majority of coworkers and supervisors that I have worked with have been of European descent. When I think about my position in a secured treatment facility for youth, all of the decision makers were of European descent. The Eurocentric concept of mental health is directly dictating the treatment for Indigenous youth and families. When I think about how I can move forward to remove this limited and biased understanding of mental wellbeing, I must prioritize immersing myself in a setting where I can learn from Indigenous decision makers. I must retrain myself through exposure to an Indigenous perspective of mental health. When I think about how long it has taken me to be comfortable providing supports with my Eurocentric tinted lens, I realize that the road to real cultural competency requires work and time and exposure to Indigenous direction regarding the identification of mental health concerns and the subsequent treatment options.

In my position as a school counsellor, I am often referred students from teachers of administrators based on what they are observing in the classroom. When approaching parents, I often find that their perspective of the problem is different. Developing counselling goals for individual students becomes complicated with the different stakeholders. Maintaining an effective therapeutic alliance has driven me to align with the family and student at times in contradiction to the desired therapeutic goals of the teacher or administrators. This is something that is very difficult for me. I have found that I am very much likely to adopt a fawning response, a response to stress that is other-focused and aims to please the other to reduce conflict (Owca, 2020). . I have the tendency to engage in people-pleasing behaviour in order to avoid conflict. I have realized that in this unique role of working under a principal and in support of families, I must lean into the discomfort of disagreeing with my administration in order to maintain an effective alliance with the family. For me this is extremely hard. This is an uncomfortable skill that I will need to continue to work at in order to effectively counsel families within a school setting.

Power Dynamic

Throughout my counselling training, a great focus has been placed on understanding the position of power, and minimizing this power differential. Although steps can be taken to minimize the perception of power-over held by a counsellor, there are multiple dimensions of the counselling context that will, by virtue of the helper relationship, continue to signal a difference in power between counsellor and client (Chan, Cor, & Band, 2018). This power differential is exaggerated when working with children, and complicated when working with Indigenous families experiencing the intergenerational effects of colonial intervention. One of the major challenges in a multicultural counselling setting is identifying and managing the dynamic of

privilege and oppression between counsellor and client (Chan et al., 2018). The dynamic between myself as a counsellor of European descent, and the colonial oppression lived by an Indigenous client, establishes a power differential that undoubtedly impedes the counselling process and calls into question the ethical obligation to do no harm. Duran (2006) argues that this power-over in the counselling setting parallels the historical oppression experienced at the hands of European colonizers and has the potential to act as a form of continued oppression and may propagate colonial harm (Duran, 2006; Stewart, 2008).

This power dynamic has caused me to reflect on when it is appropriate to counsel Indigenous families, and when it is necessary to refer Indigenous students to more culturally appropriate supports. This is complicated by some of the barriers to accessing community supports. Some of the limitations that Indigenous families face include: geographic availability, financial limitations, feelings of shame and ineffective supports (Lashta, Berdahl, & Walker, 2015).

Working with Indigenous families in a mental health capacity demands a reflection on the power differential and how this differential may influence the efficacy on the counselling process. There is a level of hypocrisy to incorporating an unavoidable power differential into the therapeutic milieu. Individuals and families are seeking support for wounds that are undoubtably linked to the intergenerational consequences of the harmful power dynamic between the governments in Canada and Indigenous people. When considering the implications that colonization and its intergenerational effects can have on the development of mental health concerns, this power differential becomes particularly unsettling. Presenting concerns resulting from colonization include the loss of identity, or the precipitants from this loss of identity (Barker et al., 2017).

In order to ethically approach counselling, I must understand how the therapeutic relationship has the potential to re-traumatize this population, and utilize techniques to limit the perceived power differential between myself and the student, and the family. This power differential is inconsistent with the ethical principles of nonmaleficence and autonomy that must be applied to the counselling setting (Kitchener, 1984; Meara et al., 1996).

The unavoidable power differential speaks to my personal limitations as a counsellor of European decent. This also suggests a need for increased indigeneity within the counselling field, and a firm understanding of the community supports available. I agree with Duran (2006) who argues that as a European descendant, there are cultural limitations to my ability to provide the most effective support to some Indigenous students. Referring an Indigenous client based on their indigeneity is directly discriminatory and in complete violation of the Alberta Human Rights Act (2018) and the CPA code of ethics (2017), and there are often geographical and financial barriers to receiving alternative supports. This suggests that in my practice I must be conscious of the power dynamic, do what I can to limit the power-over, and be as connected as possible to culturally appropriate community supports. One thing that I have needed to get comfortable with is the understanding that therapy can take many forms. At times a cultural connection can have more therapeutic effect than formalized counselling. I have had to become creative with how I approach supporting Indigenous students.

Understanding the historical relationship between Indigenous people and European Settlers is an important background to have, however, in my practice I must be conscious to approach each client as an individual. There is a danger in labelling clients as victims of oppression, and generalizing all Indigenous people as victims of historical trauma carries the risk of over-pathologizing and victimizing Indigenous clients (Duran, 2006). Duran (2006) goes

further to argue that over-pathologizing can amount to clinical racism and propagate oppression through discriminatory diagnoses by exaggerating a power dynamic. Grier (2014), identifies that a multicultural approach that emphasizes the importance of co-creation and autonomy in decolonizing the identity is an effective approach to counselling Blackfoot clients.

A shift in knowing

The shift from a scientific, objective way of knowing to a more subjecting understanding of the world is something that began long before I initiated this autoethnography. When I stumbled into a helper role in the world of disability services, my thinking began to shift. Duran (2006) argues that a counsellor who does not engage in the fundamental spiritual tradition should present this honestly to their client, and at times refer the client as a result of this limitation. The social context of my role as a counsellor in the small religious community forced me to overtly face my spiritual self.

There are many changes that I have experienced through the process of autoethnography. It takes significant practice to alter behaviours and thought patterns that have develop in childhood and this autoethnography is a starting point for change. The engagement in this autoethnography has provided me the opportunity to feel the cognitive dissonance necessary to initiate the process of change and forced me to acknowledge the colonial and harmful nature of some of my thoughts, beliefs and patterns of action. This process has made me ask myself difficult questions about my reactions and demanded that I analyze where the behaviour originated and what potential harmful outcomes may arise from its repeated use. The process has made me critically analyse what alternative beliefs, and behaviours can be utilized to ensure a more culturally appropriate outcome, and made me question my current competence in supporting Indigenous families. The self-knowledge learned throughout the autoethnographical

process has enabled a deeper understanding of who I am in the context of my roles as a sister, a counsellor, and a friend, and facilitated an understanding of who I would like to be in these roles. Gabor Mate (2003 p.xi) states that “transformation brings forth healing, the coming to integrity, to wholeness” he explains that through insight into the self we can discover truth and this in turn can lead to transformation. It is my hope that through this process I have developed a greater understanding of myself, and learned how looking in the mirror at my own thoughts, feelings, and actions. It is my hope that I have learned the importance of demanding accountability for who I am, and as Chung (2019) explains the courage to be altered.

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APPENDIX A

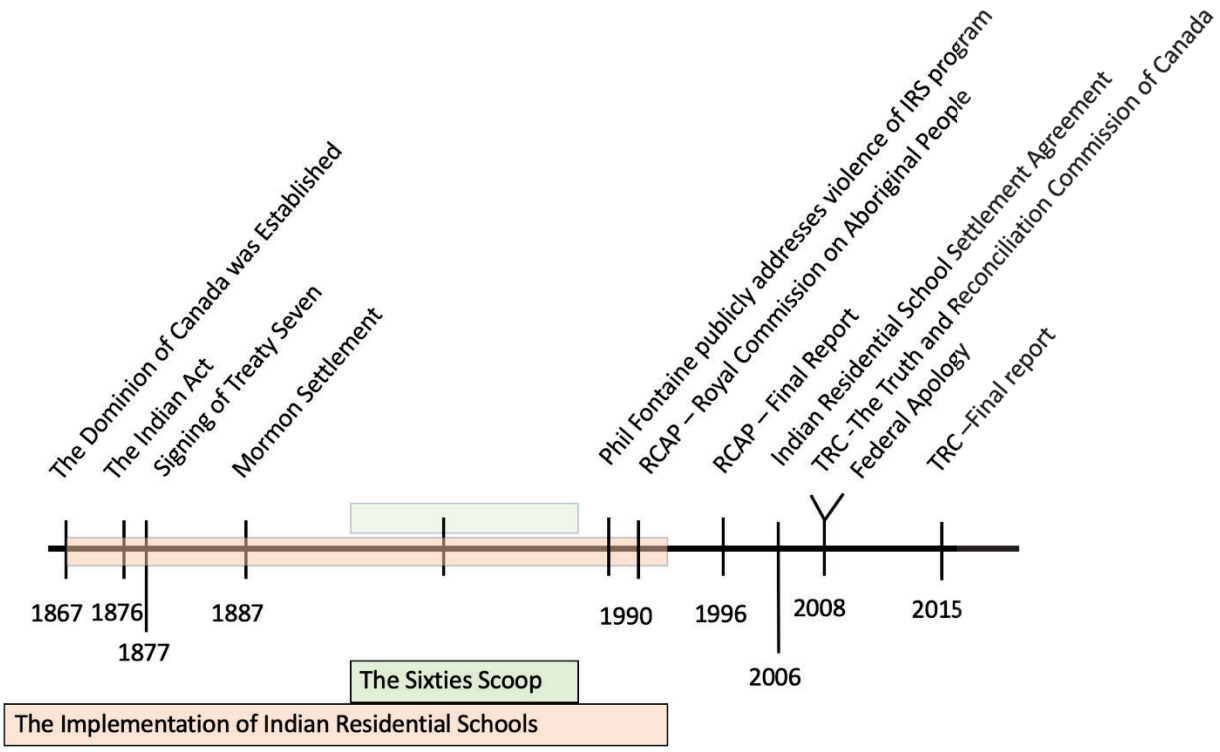

FIGURE 2.1. TIMELINE OF INDIGENOUS-SETTLER RELATIONS IN SOUTHERN ALBERTA

APPENDIX B

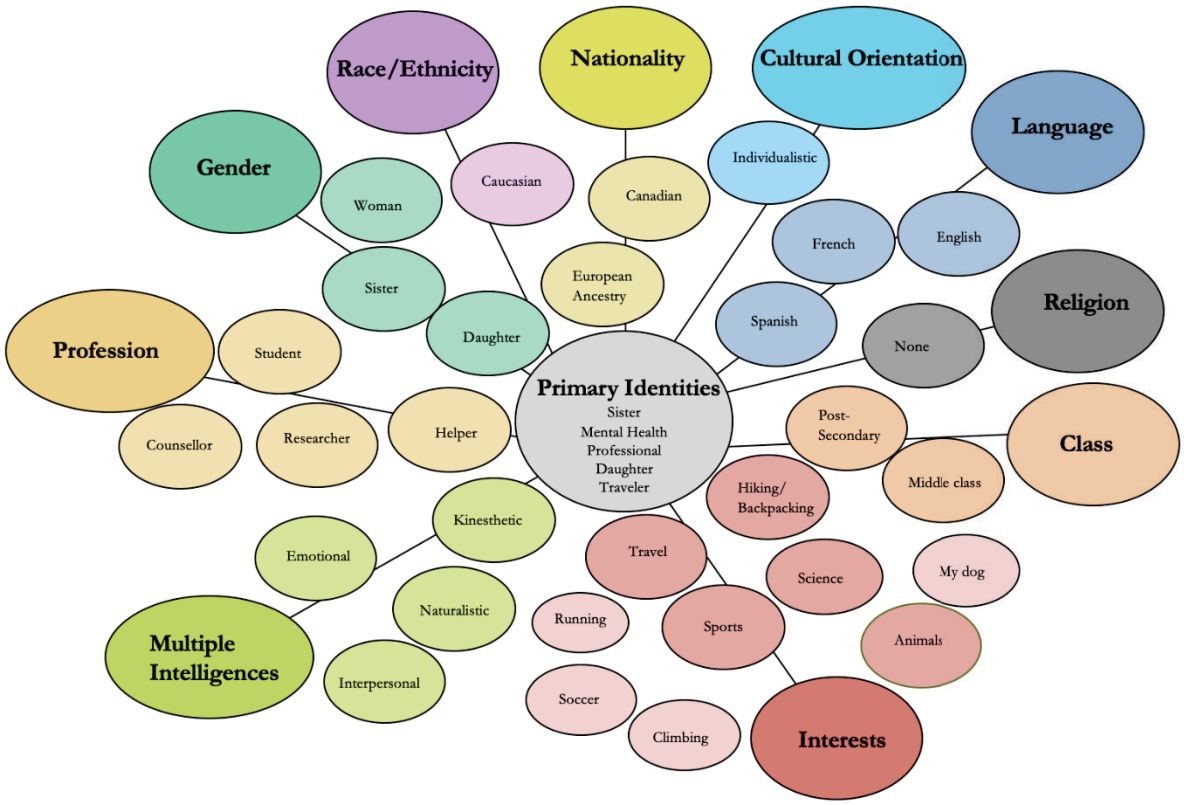

FIGURE ERROR! NO TEXT OF SPECIFIED STYLE IN DOCUMENT.1. CULTURE GRAM. VISUALIZATION OF THE SOCIAL SELF. ADAPTED FROM CHANG, 2008.