CULTURAL IDENTITY AND NOTIONS OF SAFE SPACE AMONG YOUNG INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN AN URBAN CONTEXT: THE CASE OF THUNDER BAY

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I would like to dedicate this thesis on safe spaces in Thunder Bay to my late aunt, Geraldine Carson. She was a young Indigenous woman, who fell victim to domestic violence in Thunder Bay over 25 years ago. I hope that this research can provide a platform to address many of the flaws in our society, in order to create a safe city for everyone's grandmother, mother, daughter, niece, sister, or aunt.

ABSTRACT

Indigenous people of Canada have been relocating from their home communities, and moving into larger urban city centers at unprecedented rates (Norris, Clatworthy, & Peters 2013). The population shift of Indigenous-based mobility from their respective home communities, and into larger metropolitan areas has been well discussed throughout the literature. Specifically, this social pattern has been transpiring in Thunder Bay, which has brought awareness to the new challenges and barriers that many Indigenous peoples experience when migrating to Canada's larger urban cities (Peters 2009). The young Indigenous female population in Thunder Bay are at a larger disadvantage (NIMMIWG, 2017), in terms of safe spaces, which consequently highlights that there is a gender differential that ought to be researched further.

Urban Indigenous women are at a disadvantage within society in terms of accessing culturally appropriate safe spaces (Ontario Native Women's Association n.d.; Latimer, Sylliboy, MacLeod, Rudderham, Francis, Hutt-MacLeod, Harman, & Finley 2018:1). This master's thesis is a case study of Indigenous women aged 18-29 in Thunder Bay and surrounding areas. This paper seeks to address the relationship between safety and individualized notions of how identity is developed amongst the Indigenous youth population. Therefore, I pose the question, how do notions of Indigeneity or cultural identity impact visions of what is necessary to create a safe space in an urban context? Furthermore, how do young Indigenous women conceptualize notions of safe space in Thunder Bay, in terms of their hopes, dreams and wishes of achieving their version of Mino-Bimaadiziwin – the good life?

Mino-Bimaadiziwin is Anishinaabemowin phrase for living the good life, or to have achieved the good life (Debassige 2010). Mino-Bimaadiziwin also considers how the past, present and future are interconnected in creating an individual's path for finding the good life, therefore it cannot be generalized across the population as one definition for the subjective understanding of what constitutes a good life (Debassige 2010). A good life for many participants in this particular study is discussed it in relation to their hopes, dream and wishes.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This master's thesis research project has been created in conjunction with Ontario Native Women's Association, Dr. Patricia Maguire of Carleton University, Dr. Chris Southcott of Lakehead University and graduate student researchers Alycia Benson and Josie Zussino of Lakehead University. The purpose of this master's thesis research was to give a platform and a voice to the Indigenous youth population in Thunder Bay, in order to hear their stories surrounding experiences of identity development and safe spaces. The relationship between identity is contingent upon the availability and accessibility of these social safe spaces. As such, this thesis has been set up in the following; an introduction of the literature and existing research data, Indigenous methodologies and frameworks, the data collection and analysis of this specific research project and concluding remarks.

Indigenous people of Canada have been relocating from their home communities, and moving into larger urban city centers (Norris, Clatworthy, & Peters 2013). The shift between home communities and larger metropolitan areas, such as that which has been occurring in Thunder Bay, can be looked at in terms of push and pull factors (Dowsley and Southcott 2017:3; Peters 2009). These push and pull factors can be used to understand why people are remaining within their communities, and why people are leaving their home communities for larger city centers. Yet in addition to push and pull factors, there is an increasing need to understand the new challenges and barriers that many Indigenous peoples experience when migrating to Canada's larger urban cities, like that of Thunder Bay (Peters 2009). This is especially the case of young Indigenous women who face some of the most difficult living conditions within these urban cities (NIMMIWG 2017).

The social phenomenon associated with the increasing population growth among urban Indigenous populations has been connected to numerous intersecting factors that explain this trend, such as demographic growth, mobility (Statistics Canada 2016:11), as well as socio-economic and political inequalities (Snyder, and Wilson 2015:181). There are also different 'push' and 'pull' factors that contribute differently within communities; the push factors are the conditions that drive Indigenous peoples away from their home communities, and the pull factors are the factors that attract Indigenous peoples to these urban centers (Dowsley and Southcott 2017:3). Taken together, these push and pull factors explain why many Indigenous people have taken up residency, whether it be permanent or temporary, in larger urban city centers, like that of Thunder Bay (Norris and Clatworthy 2011).

The rapidly increasing social phenomenon of Indigenous-based mobility into urban city centers has also fostered many social barriers and difficulties. The Northwestern Ontario region and the City of Thunder Bay are known for their racially charged perceptions and attitudes towards Indigenous peoples from their euro-settler counterparts (Denis, 2015; Dunk, 1987). The young Indigenous female populations in Thunder Bay are at an even larger disadvantage, therefore articulating that there is a gender differential that ought to be researched further (NIMMIWG, 2017). Young Indigenous women are moving into larger urban cities at higher rates compared to their male counterparts (Anderson 2013:60). Urban Indigenous women are bearing the brunt of many societal forms of discrimination, violence and systemic failures and are experiencing troublingly higher rates of racialized abuse, sexism and more often than not,

are victims of different forms violence (Monture & McGuire, 2009; NIMMIWG, 2017; RCMP, 2014).

Urban Indigenous women are at a disadvantage within society in terms of accessing culturally appropriate safe spaces (Ontario Native Women's Association n.d.; Latimer, Sylliboy, MacLeod, Rudderham, Francis, Hutt-MacLeod, Harman, & Finley 2018:1). Cultural Safety can be defined as the inclusion of social, political, and historical awareness, which is required to create and maintain safe locations that individuals can access (National Aboriginal Health Organization as cited by Baba 2013:8). From a health perspective, cultural safety was defined further as respect between individuals, regardless of one's social, political, linguistic, economic, and spiritual identification. In addition, the National Aboriginal Health Organization stated that cultural safety "…moves beyond the concept of cultural sensitivity to analyzing power imbalances, institutional discrimination, colonization and colonial relationships…" (National Aboriginal Health Organization as cited by Baba 2013:8). Cultural safety, regardless of its health care influenced definition, includes important elements worth considering as it relates to cultural safety as an overarching term. A report published by Northern Health noted that, "cultural safety is when all people feel respected and safe… [cultural safety is] free of racism and discrimination. People are supported to draw strengths from their identity, culture and community" (Indigenous Health 2017:5). The link between cultural safety cannot be understood without discussing cultural awareness, whereby it can be explained how "…recognizing that differences and similarities exist between cultures. Learning about the histories that impact Indigenous peoples in Canada is an important part of developing

cultural awareness" (Indigenous Health 2017:5). Additionally, cultural awareness and cultural safety go hand-in-hand in the creation of cultural sensitivity, whereby it recognizes the influences and differences among cultures and it promotes the acknowledgement of one's own biases (Indigenous Health 2017:5).

In terms of cultural safety, many Indigenous peoples feel as though their identities as Indigenous peoples and their cultures are viewed as 'out of place' in the urban setting (Peters & Lafond 2013:89). Through this social distancing effect of being the 'other', Indigenous women have become targeted within Thunder Bay (Chacaby 2018; Collins 2015:8). The significance of understanding the relationship between cultural identity and how urban Indigenous women experience many forms of societal disadvantages are of utmost importance. Indigeneity has been discussed in relation to a positive cultural identity, which promotes individuals' sense of belonging, self-worth and self-acceptance (Shepherd, Delgado, Sherwood and Paradies 2018:1). Consequently, arguing how societal disadvantages can hinder one's ability at developing and maintaining their cultural identities as Indigenous peoples.

The research on Indigeneity, populations and systematic violence is growing (Collins 2015; Peters & Lafond 2013 RCMP 2014; Razack 2016; McCaskill 2012), however there is a need for researchers to better understand the experiences of young Indigenous women living in an urban city and how their cultural identity impacts these experiences. This master's thesis is a part of a larger research project that aims to better understand the harsh reality many young Indigenous women face in Thunder Bay and what can be done to improve their well-being. The project is a case study of Indigenous

women aged 18-29 in Thunder Bay and surrounding areas. This research project is geared towards addressing the barriers that impede on young Indigenous women's path to safety and a traditionally balanced life. In Thunder Bay, there is an ongoing debate surrounding the true lived experiences of Indigenous peoples and their right to safety (Talaga, 2017)

For the purposes of this paper, my research question aims to address the relationship between safety and individualized notions of how identity is developed among the young Indigenous population of Thunder Bay. Therefore, I pose the question, how notions of Indigeneity or cultural identity impact visions of what is necessary to create a safe space in an urban context? Furthermore, how do young Indigenous women conceptualize notions of safe space in Thunder Bay, in terms of their hopes, dreams and wishes of achieving their version of Mino-Bimaadiziwin – the good life?

The methodological and theoretical considerations for this study utilizes a two-eyed seeing approach (Goulding, Steels, McGarty 2016; Marsh, Cote-Meek, Toulouse, Najavits and Young 2015). This Indigenous-centered approach focuses on how young Indigenous women residing in Thunder Bay conceptualize safe space, through both an Indigenous and a Euro-Western lens. Both approaches can be understood within this project, because this thesis is based on data collected from two Indigenous graduate researchers who used Indigenous research methods and frameworks. Yet they did so from within the very westernized institution that is higher education. However, the emphasis of this particular study is to embody and utilize the Indigenous-centered approach as a mechanism of decolonization, in saying that, the methodological foundation ought to reflect just that – a decolonializing methodological foundation (Smith 2012:73). As such,

one ought to be critical of the methodological components attached to a study such as this, due in part to the fact that the study seeks to decolonialize, and not further perpetuate a dominant westernized discourse (Harding 1998). The dominant euro-centric discourse was created for, and propelled forward by, the hierarchy within academia, whereby western epistemological discourses are pedestalled at the highest peak of the pyramid of elitisms, compared to other ways of knowing and knowledge sources (Smith 2012:74; Harding 1998). Indigenous knowledge systems are valued and accredited through this decolonialized process of research (Tachine 2008). Specifically, in this research project, the participants' stories were validated through their narratives and cultural knowledge (Marsh, Cote-Meek, Toulouse, Najavits and Young 2015).

Through the lens of decolonization as discussed by Harding, she argues that, "different cultures' knowledge systems have different resources and limitations for producing knowledge; they are not all 'equal', but there is no single possible perfect one, either" (1998:19). This is particularly important to note when the emphasis of the research process embodies Indigenous research methodologies and culturally appropriate protocol throughout the entirety of the research development and application. Hierarchies of knowledge are constantly reaffirmed through institutions, especially that of higher education, whereby they "...reproduce domesticated versions of that knowledge for uncritical consumption" (Smith 2012: 74). Harding (1998) believed that in order to move past the hierarchical system within our educational realm, one must first to comprehend that all epistemologies vary according to the geographical location, historical context and temporal periods in which it is stemming from. Smith argued along the same lines, stating

how "the globalization of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the West's view of itself as the center of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of 'civilized' knowledge" (2012:73).

The cultural protocol must also be represented in a way that appreciates the diversity of Indigenous knowledges, and respects the traditions associated with storytelling or sharing circles, as utilized within this research project.

The objective of this research project was crafted in a particular way, in order to address the relationships that individuals develop between their understanding of safe space, and how identity constructions are dependent upon individualized levels of safety within Thunder Bay.

The research methods applied within this research project incorporated the combination of semi-structured interviews, and sharing circles, each using a narrative-based approach. The interviews were arranged in a way that it would not restrict or limit the participants' expression of self within their answers. The interview guide was created by the two graduate students and the research supervisors, Dr. Chris Southcott and Dr. Patricia McGuire.

All of the participants were asked three core questions, which were created in order to assess and understand how young Indigenous women conceptualize safe space in relation to their own social location and life situations. We first inquired if Thunder Bay is a safe space for young Indigenous women. Second, we asked if achieving a safe space can be restricted through societal and individualistic barriers. Lastly, we asked what ought to be done to create a safe space in Thunder Bay for young Indigenous women.

The data collected from this project was rich and vibrant, mainly due to the very detailed stories told to the graduate researchers. In the end, 31 young Indigenous women discussed their understanding of safety in relation to a geographic space, such as Thunder Bay. The participants were asked a series of questions pertaining to general demographic information, identity construction, safe space and leadership related questions. They also discussed how safe spaces are interconnected with their life course and goal setting and attainment processes.

The concept of safe space, as defined by Ontario Native Women's Association, is the premise that we ought to stand behind all Indigenous women, as Indigenous women are the backbone of traditional societies (ONWA 2017:3). Indigenous women who are supported through these space spaces are able to take up their roles as leaders within their families and as leaders within their communities (OWNA 2017:3). Understanding the resilience that is generated when women come together in order to protect and heal each other through spirit, that is the essence of what safe spaces are built upon. One must also take into consideration, when looking at how safe spaces are created, is the involvement of spirit, which can be understood as fluid and subjective notions of life experience and life story (OWNA 2017:3). Identity is important to understand in relation to how individuals construct their own cultural realities, in other words, how these young women understand the relationship between cultural immersion, safe spaces and personal identity. As illustrated in this study, it examined the relationship between female in-migration to Thunder Bay and how these young Indigenous women experience the reality of living in an urban city, and the situations that shape their world views.

Mino-Bimaadiziwin is the Anishinaabemowin term for living the good life, or to have achieved the good life (Debassige 2010). Notions of safe space can be more appropriately understood through Indigenous philosophies of Mino-Bimaadiziwin. A good life is subjective in how individuals interpret the meaning of what constitutes a good life. Mino-Bimaadiziwin also considers how the past, present and future are interconnected in creating an individual's path for finding the good life, therefore it cannot be generalized across the population as one definition for the subjective understanding of what constitutes a good life (Debassige 2010). A good life for many participants in this particular study is discussed it in relation to their hopes, dream and wishes. These hopes dreams and wishes of a good life included discussions of health, education, employment and a life free from violence and substance abuse. For others, a good life consists a direct connection to their culture and a strong personal cultural identity.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This project's objective was created in order to address the well-being of young

Indigenous women in Thunder Bay. The research projected is centered on the steps

needed to address safety in Thunder Bay for young Indigenous women. Yet the literature

on safe space shows varying notions of the term. The literature around safe space

discusses how it is generally understood as a physical, solid, touchable place, thing or

institution where people can access some type of service, assistance or program (Latimer,

Sylliboy, MacLeod, Rudderham, Francis, Hutt-MacLeod, Harman, & Finley 2018). Other

researchers have looked at safe space in terms of accessing culturally appropriate

environments to conduct Indigenous-focused research, in a respectful manner within

higher education (Aseron, Greymorning, Miller, Wilde 2013).

Creating a safe space has been the focal point of this thesis project, whereby the

Indigenous graduate researchers focused on understanding how the participants

conceptualize safe space in terms of their own identity formation, specifically related to

how culturally grounded they are within their own Indigenous traditions. Safe space is

interwoven with the historical legacy of Indigenous colonization and assimilatory

practices. Therefore, it is essential to consider both the historical pre-contact past of the

Indigenous Nations of Canada. The teachings and customs that have been

intergenerationally passed down speak directly to one's development of Indigeneity

through culture. This is important to consider when discussing contemporary notions of

Indigeneity and cultural identities, which have been shaped and reaffirmed through an

individual's historical past, as indicated by young Indigenous women in this particular study.

Indigeneity and Historical Legacy

The true history of the Indigenous peoples of Canada have endured many hardships and societal disadvantages, whereas these assimilatory efforts of colonization have been internalized as different forms of abuse (Latimer, Sylliboy, MacLeod, Rudderham, Francis, Hutt-MacLeod, Harman, & Finley 2018:1). History must first be understood in the context how each specific Indigenous Nation does not share the same traditions, beliefs, ceremonies, stories or teachings (Lowman and Barker 2015:51). Historical influence is a concept worth considering when looking at how the research participants in this study use a narrative based approach to discuss their stories through spirit and in order to tell their truths. When one speaks their truth, they are guided by spirit, as Indigenous peoples are bonded together through these social practices, such as the oral tradition of storytelling (Leanne Simpson as cited in Sium and Ritskes 2013). Indigenous storytelling can be understood as a method of reclaiming Indigenous voices, traditional Indigenous lands and Indigenous sovereignty (Sium and Ritskes 2013: VIII). As stated by Sium and Ritskes, they emphasized that "Indigenous storytelling works to both deconstruct colonial ways of coming to know, as well as construct alternatives - recognizing that these two processes do not happen in a linear trajectory…Indigenous stories are a creative force, grounded in rootedness" (2013: VIII).

This idea is important to consider when looking at how the individuals involved in this particular study tell their stories through a narrative, and how these narratives represent their own versions of truths. This thesis project articulates the importance of

historical context, the relationship to identity constructions and the relationship it has to cultural awareness, which is paramount when discussing spirituality and land-based identities.

Historical awareness for the purpose of this thesis must include the governmental and societal forms of colonial and assimilatory practices that Indigenous generations have endured overtime. In 1876 the Indian Act was enacted and enforced; it has been used as an ongoing method of assimilation and culturally restrictive policies that have been used to civilize the Indigenous populations (Minister of Justice 1985; Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report 2015:55). The Indian Act is important to understand with specific reference to how Indigenous peoples have previously been, and still currently are, affected by the severely traumatic policies, such as residential schools, the 60's scoop and Indian Agent's restrictions on mobility (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report 2015:191).

A sense of belonging to a specific nation or community does hinge solely upon a status registration, however it does influence how one interacts amongst these guidelines in terms of communal and federal acceptance of one's personal identity as an Indigenous person (Palamater 2011). Palamater (2011) expressed that she shares commonalities with other Mi'kmaq people through the connections to ancestral knowledge, familial ties, shared histories, languages, traditions and practices that have a strong connection across other nations and specifically, her home community. She expressed how "…all these factors have contributed to my sense of identity, other factors have challenged both my identity and my sense of belonging" (2011:13).

The exclusionary practices that are upheld by government legislation continue to serve as a method as of assimilation. Indigenous identities are somehow seen to threaten the group collective, whereby the governmental policies continue to reinforce these ideologies of exclusion and continue to enforce criteria of identity indicators, but in ways that lack terms of self-recognized Indigenous identity. These mechanisms of assimilatory practices, such as residential schools, have reshaped and conformed many generations of Indigenous peoples and their world views (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report 2015). Through the process of removing the cultural identity of Indigenous peoples, and replacing it with accepted notions of European characteristics, morals and values, only then could the Indigenous peoples be considered to "civilized" in contemporary society. Instilling Christian ideologies through educational facades replaced traditional and historic teachings; with the use of fear and corporal punishment it eradicated many traditional values, teachings and languages amongst the survivors. Residential schools were utilized as a form of disconnection from their cultural identities as First Nations peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report 2015:191). Many of the survivors from the residential schools emerged into adulthood without any sense of belonging (Gone 2013:692; Collins 2015:9). Although, it has been documented that "a positive cultural identity can provide an individual with a sense of belonging, purpose, social support and self-worth" (Shepherd, Delgado, Sherwood and Paradies 2018:1). Therefore, reiterating how a disconnect sense of cultural identity can greatly hinder Indigenous peoples, and furthermore negatively impact future generations.

The substantial loss of traditional land base is undoubtedly a major contributor too Indigenous economic and cultural decline (Kendal 2001). Cultural identity, for Indigenous peoples, can be seen in a direct relationship with the land. The land provides a direct connection to ancestral knowledge and histories. Culture is also directly tied into the notion of traditional languages. A spokesperson for Biigtigong Nishnaabeg stated that, "our name change is an assertion of our Sovereignty. It is about reclaiming our identity and defining who we are as a people. Our name, Biigtigong perhaps could be a collective force that connects us to our history, to our ancestors, to our land, to our relations and to the generations to come" (Biigtigong 2015:5). Language is in a direct relationship with identity, whereby it is not solely means of communication, but as an expression of cultural identity (Brown, McPherson, Peterson, Newman, & Cranmer 2012:52). The loss of words, phrases and entire Indigenous languages is an increasing trend emerging over the years. The loss of culture is multifaceted in the way that, "this profound loss of identity and sense of belonging, of displacement and dispossession, is echoed [within many communities]. Elders [have indicated] that being unable to speak the language has undermined, if not extinguished, the primary mode through which culture is kept alive and history is passed on (Brown, McPherson, Peterson, Newman, & Cranmer 2012:52). Language is absolutely integral when looking at cultural identity and a sense of belonging amongst the Indigenous populations, because as mentioned above, identity is passed on through the language (Brown, McPherson, Peterson, Newman, & Cranmer 2012:52).

As Canada progressed forward into the Twenty First Century, Indigenous peoples increasingly face modernized social issues, such as generations who have been severely

impacted through traumas stemming from historical legacies of colonialism, which directly influence the contemporary philosophies of cultural identity (Latimer, Sylliboy, MacLeod, Rudderham, Francis, Hutt-MacLeod, Harman, & Finley 2018). In other words, these families are suffering because of a lost generation of culture, language, stories and traditions.

Indigenous Peoples and Urbanization

To understand the true lived experiences of modern day Indigenous peoples, one must first understand the population demographics of the current times. The populations of First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples across Canada are growing at high rates. The 2016 census noted that Indigenous peoples represent approximately 4.9% of the total Canadian population. The data showed a growth rate of 42.5% between 2006 and 2016 (Statistics Canada 2016:1). The rapidly growing populations are due in part to self-identification of Indigeneity increasing over the years, as well as natural increases (Norris, Clatworthy & Peters 2013: 36; Statistics Canada 2016:1). Over the last few decades' Indigenous peoples have been relocating from their home communities to urban city centers (Statistics Canada 2016:11). One study looked at the comparison between in- migration and relocation within the same geographical area (O'Hagan 2014). This study verified Southcott's (2006) original findings, that Northern Ontario's shifting population numbers are not due to external migration, but rather stem from people shifting and moving within the confines of the same geographical area (Southcott 2006).

The social phenomenon of urban Indigenous population growth has been connected to numerous intersecting factors, such as demographic growth, mobility (Statistics Canada 2016:11), and socio-economic and political inequalities (Snyder, and

Wilson 2015:181). There are also distinctive 'push' and 'pull' factors that contribute differently within communities; the push factors are the conditions that push Indigenous peoples away from their home communities, and the pull factors are the factors that keep Indigenous peoples within the confines of their communities (Dowsley & Southcott 2017:3). Dowsley and Southcott (2017) emphasized that some of the push and pull factors can be understood differently amongst men and women, therefore it is important to look at the individualized factors for staying or leaving the communities. One of the major push factors for Indigenous women can be understood as one seeking a higher level of education (Dowsley and Southcott 2017). This social phenomena of young Indigenous women relocating from their home communities to larger cities can be understood as 'female flight', and it is through this out-migration that Indigenous communities face an ongoing issue of young and educated women not returning back home.

The rapid growth of Indigenous populations can be understood as a combination of high fertility rates, but also as a higher rate of Indigenous peoples' self-reporting on census-based surveys (Norris and Clatworthy 2011). The increasing self-identification rates of Indigeneity can be understood as a reclaiming of culture, identity and history when compared to the assimilatory history of colonization.

Census data can help us better understand the current situation of Indigenous people in Thunder Bay. This data shows that Thunder Bay has been experiencing higher rates of Indigenous population growth, as seen in Table 1. This table shows the population trends from 1996 2016. In terms of Indigenous mobility into the City of Thunder Bay, it can be seen that the percentage of people living in the city and claiming Indigenous

identity jumped from 5.8% in 1996 to 12.8% in 2016.

Table 1: Indigenous Identity Population in the City of Thunder Bay

Census Year	Total Population	Aboriginal Identity	Aboriginals as a % of Pop.	Males	Females	Sex Ratio
1996	112415	6510	5.8			
2001	107405	7250	6.8	3285	3955	83.1
2006	107290	8845	8.2	4090	4755	86.0
2011	105950	10085	9.5	4675	5410	86.4
2016	105220	13485	12.8	6365	7120	89.4

Source: Census Profiles by Census Subdivision, 1996 to 2016, Statistics Canada (www12.statcan.gc.ca). Data for 2011 is from the National Household Survey rather than the census and the data is less reliable than that of the census.

Table 2 illustrates the Thunder Bay Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) data, which

also includes Fort William First Nation in the calculations used to create the statistics.

Table 2: Indigenous Identity Population in the Thunder Bay Census Metropolitan Area

Census Year	Total Population	Aboriginal Identity	Aboriginal as a % of Pop.	Males	Females	Sex Ratio
1996	124325	7330	5.90			
2001	120370	8200	6.81	3730	4470	83.4
2006	121050	10055	8.31	4655	5400	86.2
2011	119145	11670	9.79	5390	6285	85.8
2016	118875	15070	12.68	7125	7945	89.7

Source: Census Profiles by Census Subdivision, 1996 to 2016, Statistics Canada (www12.statcan.gc.ca). Data for 2011 is from the National Household Survey rather than the census and the data is less reliable than that of the census.

The data represented in Tables 1 and 2 speak to the gender differential in Thunder

Bay's Indigenous population. It illustrated the higher rates of female mobility from

smaller rural and remote communities into larger cities, like that of Thunder Bay, which

confirms the notion of 'Female Flight' as discussed earlier (Dowsley and Southcott 2017; Hamilton & Seyfrit, 1993; Rasmussen, 2007).

Table 3 highlights the mobility trends, which looks at patterns of movement throughout the population over a period of 5 years.

Table 3: Population having moved over the previous 5 years Thunder Bay CMA 2016

	Aboriginal Identity		Non-Aboriginal Identity	
	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.
Total population 5 years and over in a Private Household	13720		99535	
Non-movers	7135	52.0	70070	70.4
Movers	6585	48.0	29465	29.6
Non-migrants	4560	33.2	20260	20.4
Migrants	2025	14.8	9200	9.2
Internal migrants	2005	14.6	7740	7.8
Intraprovincial migrants	1680	12.2	6135	6.2
Interprovincial migrants	330	2.4	1600	1.6
External migrants	15	0.1	1465	1.5

Source: Aboriginal Population Profile, 2016 Census, Statistics Canada

The data illustrates that 14.6% of the 2016 Indigenous population in Thunder Bay had come from somewhere else in the previous 5 years. The majority of in-migration occurred from within Ontario. The comparable rate of in-migration among non-Indigenous residents was 7.8%.

The push and pull factors that contribute to the higher rates of Indigenous mobility into urban city centers (Dowsley & Southcott 2017:3), as discussed previously, is an important factor worth considering further when looking at Thunder Bay's unique situation. Education is a pull factor worth examining in greater detail, as many young women have left their home communities in hopes of obtaining a higher education in an

urban city (Dowsley & Southcott 2017:3). Table 4 illustrates the educational attainment of

Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents in Thunder Bay. The table highlights that over

one third of the Indigenous population has less than a high school diploma, compared to

18% in the non-Indigenous population. On the other end of the spectrum, Indigenous

peoples whom hold a university degree are 11.1%, compared to 20.5% of non-Indigenous

residents.

Table 4: Highest Level of Education Achieved Thunder Bay CMA 2016

	Aboriginal Identity		Non-Aboriginal Identity	
	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.
Total population 15 years or higher in private households	10885		90255	
No certificate, diploma or degree	3765	34.6	16300	18.1
Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalency certificate	2690	24.7	23815	26.4
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	620	5.7	7645	8.5
Trades certificate or diploma other than Certificate of Apprenticeship or Certificate of Qualification	385	3.5	3080	3.4
Certificate of Apprenticeship or Certificate of Qualification	245	2.3	4560	5.1
College, CEGEP or another non-university certificate or diploma	2450	22.5	22180	24.6
University certificate or diploma below bachelor level	155	1.4	1825	2.0
University certificate, diploma or degree at bachelor level or above	1210	11.1	18505	20.5
Bachelor's degree	910	8.4	13175	14.6
University certificate, diploma or degree above bachelor level	300	2.8	5330	5.9

Source: Aboriginal Population Profile, 2016 Census, Statistics Canada

Despite these educational differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous

residents, further analysis comparing education rates of Indigenous women and

Indigenous men show that women have higher rates of formal education than men (Table

5). This confirms that that education may be an important pull factor for young

Indigenous women in Thunder Bay.

Table 5: Highest Level of Education Achieved and Gender Thunder Bay CMA 2016

	Indigenous Identity Females		Indigenous Identity Males	
	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.
Total population aged 15 years and over in private households	5835		5050	
No certificate, diploma or degree	1920	32.9	1850	36.6
Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalency certificate	1305	22.4	1385	27.4
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	175	3.0	450	8.9
College, CEGEP or another non-university certificate or diploma	1525	26.1	920	18.2
University certificate or diploma below bachelor level	95	1.6	60	1.2
University certificate, diploma or degree at bachelor level or above	820	14.1	385	7.6

Source: Aboriginal Population Profile, 2016 Census, Statistics Canada

Employment opportunities are another pull factor that many Indigenous women

experience when contemplating whether to stay in their communities or relocate to larger

city centers (Dowsley & Southcott 2017). In Table 6, one can see that employment rates

among Indigenous populations are lower when compared to the non-Indigenous resident

column. The rate of unemployment is over double that of the non-Indigenous population

in Thunder Bay. According to the data available pertaining to on-reserve employment

rates, it illustrated an employed rate of 47 percent for Indigenous peoples (Statistics

Canada, National Household Survey 2011). The data shows a slightly higher rate of

employment on first nation reservations. However, when looking at the breakdown of

how education influences employment rates, it illustrates different trends, such as: having

no educational degrees or diplomas resulted in an employed rate of 33 percent; having a

high school diploma resulted in an employed rate of 49.3 percent; and a post-secondary

degree or higher resulted in an employed rate of 64.7 percent (Statistics Canada, National

Household Survey 2011).

Table 6 Labour Force Status Thunder Bay CMA 2016

	Aboriginal Identity	Non-Aboriginal Identity
Total population aged 15 years and over in private households - 25% Sample data	10890	90255
In the labour force	5980	55715
Employed	5085	51860
Unemployed	895	3855
Not in the labour force	4905	34545
	Pct.	*Pct.*
Participation rate	54.9	61.7
Employment rate	46.7	57.5
Unemployment rate	15	6.9
Worked Full-time	38.9	47.9
Worked Part-time	17.7	17.1
Average weeks worked	39.2	42.8

Source: Aboriginal Population Profile, 2016 Census, Statistics Canada

Figure 1 is illustrative of the occupations held by the employed Indigenous

workforce, and the non-Indigenous workforce.

Figure 1: Employment Trends in Thunder Bay CMA 2016

Employment by Industry Thunder Bay CMA 2016

Industry	Non-Aboriginal Identity	Aboriginal Identity
91 Public administration	7.9	9.4
81 Other services (except public administration)	4.3	4.8
72 Accommodation and food services	7.4	12.0
71 Arts, entertainment and recreation	2.0	1.3
62 Health care and social assistance	17.6	19.6
61 Educational services	6.7	9.1
56 Administrative and support, waste...	3.1	3.5
55 Management of companies and enterprises	0.0	0.0
54 Professional, scientific and technical services	5.6	2.6
53 Real estate and rental and leasing	1.3	1.3
52 Finance and insurance	2.3	1.7
51 Information and cultural industries	2.1	1.1
48-49 Transportation and warehousing	5.1	5.6
44-45 Retail trade	11.9	12.2
41 Wholesale trade	2.6	1.9
31-33 Manufacturing	5.4	4.2
23 Construction	7.9	6.8
22 Utilities	1.0	0.6
21 Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	1.3	2.5
11 Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	1.9	1.8

Percentage of employment

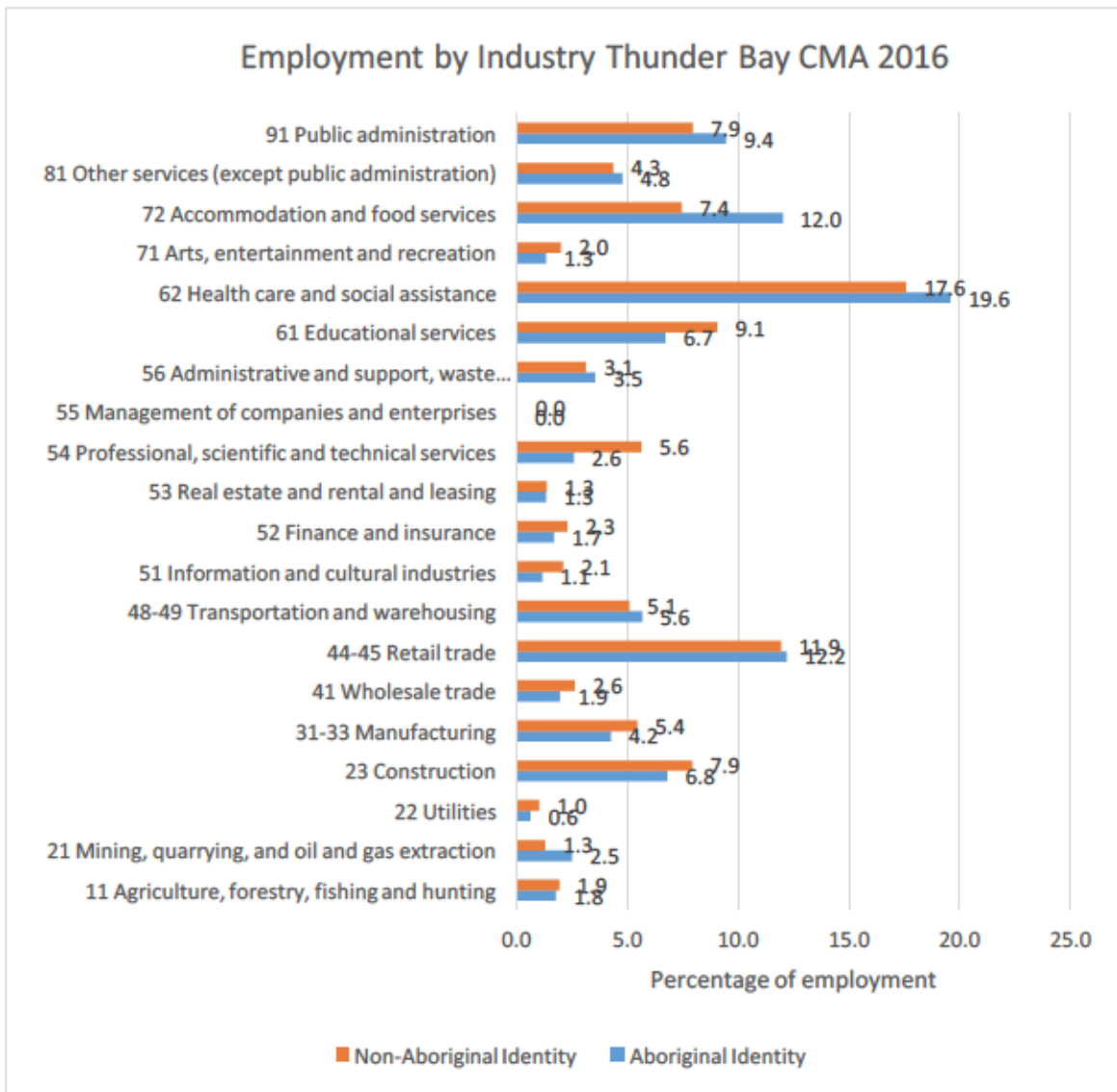■ Non-Aboriginal Identity ■ Aboriginal Identity

Figure 1 Source : Aboriginal Population Profile, 2016 Census, Statistics Canada

Figure 1 highlights a higher rate of employment among the Indigenous population in terms of accommodations and food services, health and social assistance, public administration while a lower rate of employment in the professional, scientific, technical and educational sectors.

Figure Two compares incomes between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population in the Thunder Bay CMA. The data suggests that Indigenous workers are experiencing lower incomes by more than 45% compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. As seen in Figure 2, the average income for Indigenous peoples is roughly $33,000, compared to non-Indigenous incomes of $43,000 per annum.

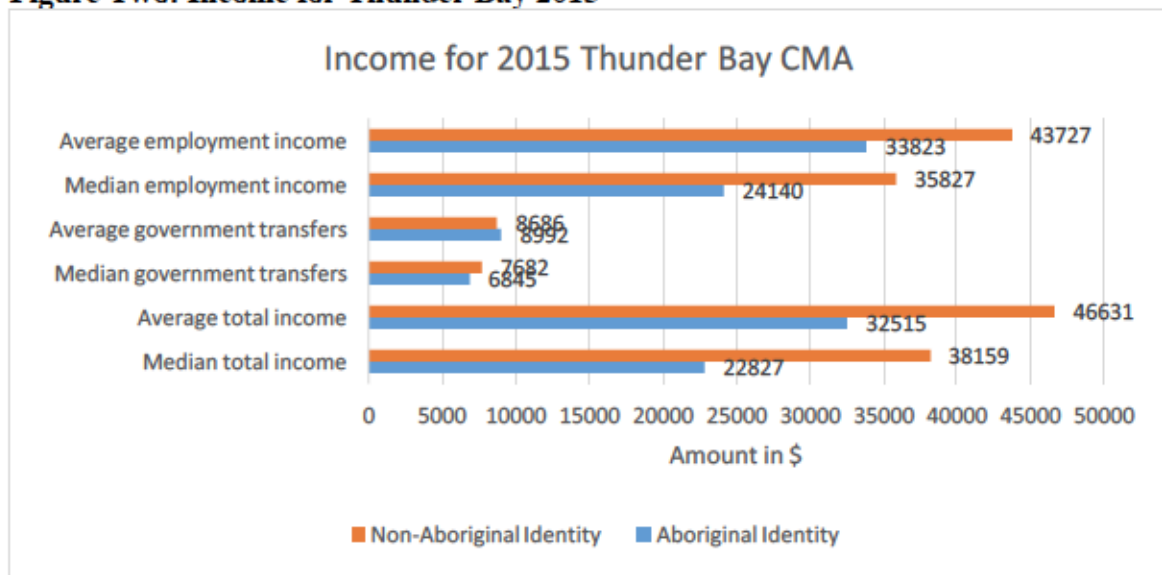**Figure Two: Income for Thunder Bay 2015**

Figure 2 Source : Aboriginal Population Profile, 2016 Census, Statistics Canada

The tables and figures represented above illustrate the reality of the situation that many Indigenous residents of Thunder Bay experience. The numbers illustrate that Indigenous populations are continuously growing at unprecedented rates, as seen in the 2016 census data reports. The overall consensus of the report showcased how Indigenous peoples are disadvantaged on numerous fronts, such as employment, income, and education. However, when compared to the living conditions on many First Nations communities, the level of disadvantage is greatly increased for those living on-reserve

(Assembly of First Nations 2011). These push and pull factors are interconnected in terms of what keeps people in their communities and what pulls them into city centers, as such the case of Thunder Bay (Dowsley & Southcott 2017).

Discourses surrounding the migration of Indigenous peoples from their home communities have been viewed as a transition into internalizing assimilatory ways of being, therefore leaving their culture and traditional practices in the past (Norris, Clatworthy & Peters 2013:30). Young Indigenous women are also moving into urban cities in larger numbers compared to their male counterparts (Anderson 2013:60; Census Data 2016).

Young Indigenous Women, Urban Challenges and Safe Spaces

The importance of understanding the connection between the mobility of Indigenous students from their home communities into Thunder Bay is paramount for understanding safe spaces in the context of Thunder Bay. For the purpose of this research, the goal is to understand how safe spaces can be understood in terms of how Indigenous youth experience Thunder Bay, and what they would recommend to be done in order to create a safer city.

Discrimination at the individual level can alter a person's sense of identity, self-esteem and overall life chances (McCaskill 2012). On a larger scale, discriminatory interactions at the societal level can lead to adverse stereotypical assumptions as to how Indigenous peoples are perceived by their non-Indigenous counterparts (McCaskill 2012). These forms of discriminatory practices can further weaken cultural and individual identities of those affected (Harper and Thompson 2017; McCaskill 2012). This is

particularly true when discussing urban Indigenous peoples, due in part to the fact that

interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous are most acute (McCaskill 2012).

Urban Indigenous women are at the forefront of many societal forms of

discrimination, violence and systemic failures, Anderson stated that:

> "…[these] women have borne the brunt of some of the most negative effects of urban [Indigenous]/non-[Indigenous] relations. Perhaps most starkly demonstrated in the now infamous Robert Pickton trial, a major aspect of these negative relations includes the sexualization of [Indigenous] women in urban locales. This reflects not only the broad stereotypes of [Indigenous] women who end up as sex trade workers on the streets of Canada's cities…and the (related) number of missing and murdered [Indigenous] women – many in transit from rural to urban locations…" (2013:62).

Urban Indigenous women are at a disadvantage within society in terms of cultural safe

spaces. Safe Space, as explained by Ontario Native Women's Association, is being able

to understand how safe space from an Indigenous women's viewpoint would incorporate

the fluidity and subjectivity that represents individualized understandings of the term,

which takes into account personal experience and personal life choices (OWNA 2017:3).

Therefore, positioning that safe spaces are essentially "[notions] of sacredness of caring

and kindness, a place of respect, [and] a place without harm" (OWNA 2017:3). Safe

spaces are also symbolic of the idea that we ought to stand behind our women, as

Indigenous women are the focal point for everything that OWNA does, therefore safe

spaces are also understood as places women can take up their roles as leaders to their

families, and leaders within their communities (ONWA 2017:3).

In terms of cultural safety, many Indigenous peoples feel as though their identities

as Indigenous peoples and their cultures are viewed as 'out of place' in the urban setting

(Peters & Lafond 2013:89). To further articulate this point, Peters and Lafond stated that, "the association of 'authentic' First Nation identities with spaces outside the city means that in urban areas they are viewed as "inauthentic" or degraded" (2013:89). This troublesome context means that we need to address the various conceptualizations of safety amongst young Indigenous women, and how this could potentially affect them in achieving their hopes, dreams and life goals. Furthermore, it is important to understand how young Indigenous women understand their Indigeneity in contemporary society, with specific reference to the ability to exercise one's traditional practices in a culturally safe spaces. As Belanger et al. (2003) concluded, there is a strong association between cultural identity and the ability to practice traditional activities (as cited in Peters and Lafond 2013:90). Peters and Lafond (2013:91) found that these traditional practices, such as smudging, dancing and powwows, assisted in the construction and maintenance of the youths' identities as Indigenous Nations' peoples. Additionally, retaining a strong cultural identity has been linked to a greater level of resilience, higher levels of self-esteem, acquired social skills that assist in combatting and deflecting discrimination related distress (Shepherd, Delgado, Sherwood and Paradies 2018:1). The purpose of this master's thesis research is to understand how Indigeneity is dependent on a strong cultural identity, which then is directly tied to the health of one's traditional cultural surroundings. The association between Indigeneity and safe spaces is contingent upon how strong and resilient one's cultural identity is in the face of adversity and societal hardship and social pressures.

Another challenge facing Indigenous women in an urban setting is the social phenomenon of human trafficking, specifically among Indigenous women. Human trafficking, according to the Canadian Department of Justice, "…involves the recruitment, transportation, harbouring and/or exercising control, direction or influence over the movements of a person in order to exploit that person, typically through sexual exploitation or forced labour" (2016). It also included that human trafficking is run through organized criminal networks, as well as individually, and pushes through national and international borders (Department of Justice 2016). The exploiters control their victims in multiple ways, such as removing their person identification documents, passports, physical abuse and violence, intimidation, isolation and threats (Department of Justice 2016). Indigenous women, specifically in Canada, are at a much higher risk of being trafficked due in part to multiple intersecting factors of social-political facets, such as "…racial discrimination, extreme poverty, unemployment, homelessness, mental health issues, suicide risks, substance abuse, difficult familial or institutional situations, and high rates of both physical and sexual abuse" (Collins 2015:8).The discriminatory and racist stereotypes of Indigenous women being dirty, promiscuous, and deviant popularized the accepted normative discourses of appropriate womanly behaviour (Collins 2015). These societal assumptions of normative behaviours have paved the way for biased stereotypes of Indigenous women, which devalues the life of Indigenous women, and perpetuates ideologies that limit an individual's right to safety (Collins 2015). Despite the well-documented over-representation of Indigenous women visibly involved in street-based sex work in urban cities and the unparalleled number of missing and murdered Indigenous

women, there is a lack of attention within public policy and research on the true lived

experiences of Indigenous women working in the sex trades (Bingham, Leo, Zhang,

Montaner, and Shannon 2014:441). Collins (2015) estimated that Indigenous women

make up seventy percent of those involved in the street-based sex trades; specifically

speaking, in urban settings, the number ranges towards ninety percent. The human

trafficking ring is a very important factor to consider when discussing safe space in

Thunder Bay, and how the interconnections are made to some young Indigenous women's

involuntary involvement in the sex trafficking ring.

One case in particular that has shocked the nation, was that of Cindy Gladue.

Collins argued that the Gladue case points to the systemic failures of the justice system,

and how it further perpetuates the lack criminal accountability in matters of Indigenous

victims (2015). The case of Cindy Gladue is extremely horrific, however the details of her

case are important to include, since they speak to the lack of justice served to her and

many other Indigenous women. Collins noted that, "according to the autopsy, 'she died as

a result of blood loss due to a perforating sharp injury to the vagina – likely a stab wound

caused by a knife.' Ms. Gladue's vagina, to be presented to the jury, as the autopsy photos

were not deemed clear enough" (2015:16). This request to dismember Gladue's body and

in order to present it to the court illustrated a clear violation of Indigenous notions of

respect and honour for the deceased (Collins 2015). The end result of this court case

culminated in the acquittal of the accused murderer, Mr. Barton (Collins 2015:16). The

policies surrounding the treatment of Indigenous women are severely skewed in terms of

police interactions, justice system interactions and general public interactions. Culhane

(2003: 603) emphasized that, "the representational politics surrounding the missing [and murdered] women mark an important moment for [Indigenous] and non-[Indigenous] women. The strongest criticism of the police – and by proxy, of the public – has been that they ignored early reports because the women were prostitutes, addicts, [and] [Indigenous]." Regardless of culture, race, age, sexual orientation or identity, it is important to remember that "these women are mothers, sisters, aunts. They are human beings" (Culhane 2003:603). The violence against Indigenous women is a large societal issue, which needs to be addressed on a more substantial level.

Another challenge faced by Indigenous people living in an urban setting that is especially relevant for young Indigenous women is that of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The extent of the problem is seen in the fact that a national inquiry was organized on the issue (NIMMIW, 2018). In their Executive Report, The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls noted the importance of the issue for all Canadians. It also emphasized that "…violence against Indigenous people – including women and girls – is rooted in colonization" (2018:4). Desensitization and normalizing of murder has become so prominent within the Canadian culture, that one frequently is facing news about rivers being dragged and bodies being found, as seen throughout Thunder Bay. In Winnipeg, the normalization of missing and murdered Indigenous women have been described as a reoccurring phenomenon, that volunteers have embarked on dragging the Red River in search of the missing Indigenous bodies (Razack 2016:1). For example, the story of a 14-year-old Indigenous girl murdered and pulled from the Red River in Winnipeg, the tragic events that unfolded around Tina

Fountaine's death and the case of Cindy Gladue (Razack 2016:2). These issues are in

direct connection with the missing and murdered Indigenous peoples whom are being

pulled from the river's, ditches, forests and parks around Thunder Bay, as mentioned

previously. Indigenous populations represent roughly 4.3% of the total Canadian

population, however missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls account for 25%

of the entire populations recorded missing and murdered statistics (Walter 2015:128).

However, this number is only reflective of the cases that have been coded and

documented as being missing or murdered, and many speculate the true number is much

higher and possibly in the thousands (Native Women's Association of Canada (n.d.).

Maya Chacaby's recount of her lived experience as a 'missing but not missed'

Indigenous youth, depicts her story of how she was missing in a society that didn't care to

notice she was gone (2018:126). She explained that there is a difference between going

missing and being missed, whereby Maya explained missing as a place that:

> … the inhabitants are missing, but not missed…not as sad pictures of missing
> children on milk cartons though. Fixed instead in the psychic disequilibrium of
> being a less than human, human. Counted as a certain kind of problem: the
> imperial Indian Problem that fails to adjust to modernity, institutionally transfixed,
> pinned down by the gaze of arrogant perception" (Chacaby 2018:126).

Maya asserted that when she went missing in contemporary society, it had a strong

connection to failing within the expectations modern-day western society. She refused to

conform, assimilate or transform into the proper civilized expectation (Chacaby

2018:129). Her refusal to speak a language that was not representative of herself and

identity was met with sharp tongues, and she failed at many modern western systems,

such as the formal education system (Chacaby 2018:129). She recounted a time when she, as a child, faced assimilation or fading into nothingness:

> So after failing grade one, they diagnosed me as a retard. A line was drawn. If I wanted to be human, I had to speak English. If I wanted to progress, I had to interact with humans. And I did. Progress. By grade five I spoke in Shakespearian Soliloquies and drew lines with broken beer bottles along my arms. Teased by my classmates for my failed suicide attempts, "Aren't you dead yet?" they'd ask (Chacaby 2018:129).

Missing to Maya was not being seen – not being counted – she was left in a world that did not care to look for her. She tried to resurface again, near adulthood, and upon her attempt to return home, she failed. There was no home to return to, there was no safe place to go. She remembered that, "her failed attempt to go home wasn't noticed but her failed attempt at suicide soon after was. Then a psych ward, where being served breakfast meant staying in your locked concrete room crying all day. No breakfast meant you got electro-shocked, hosed down and left for a day of rehabilitative oblivion. I never tried to go home after that. I was fifteen" (Chacaby 2018:131).

> To return from a missing state, as Maya explained, is to be:

> …considered rehabilitated and therefore no longer missing when we get nuclear-family type housing isolated from our communities, get off the street drugs and get on anti-depressants, go to Western schools, get a 'normal' job, and get our children back from Children's Aid Society. That is it. That is rehabilitation. What is really missing though – what is made to remain disappeared through the assimilative process of rehabilitation towards a norm that is not ours – is learning how to live well as Anishinaabe. Not some frozen-in-time beads-and-feathers version, but how to live the good life as skilled knowers of our environment even if that environment is the urban Anishinaabe post-apocalypse (Chacaby 2018:135).

Maya brought forth many revelations regarding missing Indigenous women and girls, and how some fall through the cracks and are not necessarily missing, but lost in a world that

does not care to look for them. This story, her story, is remarkable and she is brave to share her own truths and journey throughout her life. This narrative of how a missing but not missed youth reclaimed her identity and made the world accept her place, regardless of if it fits into the categories of rehabilitated and normative.

The research on Indigeneity, populations and systematic violence is growing, however there is a need for researchers to address the experiences of young Indigenous women living in an urban city. As such, this research provides a case study of Indigenous women aged 18-29 in Thunder Bay and surrounding areas. This research project is geared towards addressing the barriers that impede on young Indigenous women's path to safety and a traditionally balanced life. As discussed above, many intersecting factors contribute to the barriers Indigenous peoples face in Canada, especially in Northwestern Ontario. A historical legacy of trauma, abuse and assimilatory practices have shaped and reshaped many families across the Nation. The aftermath of these policies and practices have led to disproportionate rates of Indigenous peoples experiencing many societal barriers, such as poverty, racism-charged assumptions, police violence, systemic violence, human trafficking, loss of culture, a decline of identity and traditional practices. Identity and cultural identity is another theme emerging through the literature and illustrated that "[crafting] a strong cultural identity is a particularly important developmental task for Indigenous and other ethnic minority young people who experience discrimination, racism, and prejudice" (Wexler 2009:269). Identity, as Wexler speculated, is "[the] ways in which a people understand their collective, cultural history can have profound effects on an individual's sense of identity" (2009:270).

In Thunder Bay, there is an ongoing debate surrounding the true lived experiences of Indigenous peoples and their right to safety but is clear there are many challenges that young Indigenous women are faced with. The idea behind safe space promotes the creation and maintenance of a social place that empowers women to regain their roles as leaders within their families and communities (OWNA 2017:3). When women are surrounded by space spaces they can immerse themselves within the traditions and culture that is the very foundation of what creates a sense of Indigeneity.

Chapter Three: Indigenous Methodologies & Frameworks

Story work, as Jo-ann Archibald emphasized, is a process that involves "[educating] the heart, the mind, the body, and the spirit. She suggests that stories engage listeners and the story teller in a respectful relationship of reciprocity that creates and sustains oral culture" (as cited in Smith 2012:144). Therefore, in order to situate the researchers within the Indigenous-centered research epistemology, one must first acknowledge the story work protocols and expectations within the Indigenous research methodological frameworks.

This research project has been situated in a way that promotes young Indigenous women whom reside in an urban city to speak to their true lived experiences of safe spaces in Thunder Bay. Additionally, this research project emphasizes the balance between Indigenous research methods and modern research methodologies; this concept of duality has been placed at the foundational core of this research methodology. This project used a combination of approaches to gather data and included Indigenous methodologies such as story work and sharing circles.

This particular study, as mentioned previously, employs mechanisms of decolonization. In saying that, the methodological foundation of this research ought to be reflective of a decolonializing research approach. As such, one ought to be critical of the methodological components attached to a study such as this, due in part to the fact that the study seeks to decolonialize, and not further perpetuate a dominant westernized discourse (Harding 1998; Smith 2012). The dominant euro-centric discourse was created for, and propelled forward by, the hierarchy within academia, whereby western epistemological

discourses are pedestalled at the highest peak of the pyramid of elitisms, compared to other ways of knowing and knowledge sources (Smith 2012:74; Harding 1998). Smith emphasized that "academic knowledges are organized around the idea of disciplines and fields of knowledge. These are deeply implicated in each other and share genealogical foundations in various classical and enlightenment philosophies" (2012:75). Harding stated that the postcolonial standpoint disputes that, "different cultures' knowledge systems have different resources and limitations for producing knowledge; they are not all 'equal', but there is no single possible perfect one, either" (1998:19). To deconstruct the hierarchical standing of elitism, Harding (1998) believed that one ought to understand that epistemologies vary according to the specific geographical context, historical context and temporal periods. One such epistemological discourse is that of Indigeneity-based knowledge. When discussing Indigenous ways of knowing, it is essential to have conversations around the nature of knowledge transference and ownership of the ideas, notions or visions (Smith 2012:96).

Furthermore, when one is to employ an Indigenous methodology, such as sharing circles, story, or protocol, they must also ensure that "…an Indigenous framework with a tribal epistemology ought to be recognized, as opposed to assuming that Indigenous methods can be subsumed under a Western way of knowing" (Kovach 2010:35). These two elements go hand-in-hand when discussing both Indigenous-based frameworks and Indigenous epistemologies. Indigenous methodologies ought to reflect the nature of Indigenous ways of knowing and world views; Indigenous methodologies as used as the focal point of this research study respect the traditional protocols associated with story-

telling narratives and sharing circles. Story-telling or self-narratives are used as a method of knowledge exchange, which can be seen through traditional Indigenous teachings, or the use of traditional medicines (Tachine 2018:65; Wright 2018). It is vital that Indigenous-centered researchers acknowledge that the knowledge shared to them is not owned, and must always be given back to the respectful owners (Marsh, Cote-Meek, Toulouse, Najavits and Young 2015:3).

Indigenous methodologies used within higher education are faced with systematic blockades, which further limit and exclude Indigenous ways of knowing and research typologies from the scholarly and academic fields (Davidson, Minthorn and Waterman 2018:7). There is a need to Indigenize research within higher education; mainstream academia is more or less glorified upon a pedagogical discourse that does not shine light onto other ways of knowing. One ought to engage with pedagogies of knowledge with an open frame of mind, emphasizing that, "it is not a question of choosing one pedagogical perspective over the other. Rather, it is finding a way to make space for both – and to be enriched by both. This is a process that requires the dominant academic discourse to pause, listen, and make room for a discourse that may seem incongruous and dissonant at times" (Davidson, Minthorn and Waterman 2018:7). One such way to Indigenize higher education's realm of research is to include methodologies that are complimentary to the Indigenous researchers and participants.

Story telling or self-narratives are a way to share knowledge from one individual to another; this form of knowledge transmission can also be viewed as a vessel for sharing teachings, medicines, guidance or future recommendations (Tachine 2018:65; Wright

2018; Sium and Ritskes 2013). The importance of acknowledging that within this research, the researcher is never is a position to own the words, data or knowledge that the participants have shared. The knowledge is always brought back to the keeper, whereby the credit and acknowledgement is reconfirmed with them. Through this approach the decolonializing research process of restoring the power differential is evened out; it is through the validation of the knowledge keepers and their stories that we as researchers are able to borrow their knowledge (Iseke 2013:561).

Indigenous researchers doing Indigenous centered research, such as the case in this research project, are walking the line between mainstream western discourses and Indigenous ways of knowing. It is through the validation of the researcher's story and life path that has led them to where they are today, asking the questions they are and challenging the dominant systems in place. Research is viewed to be objective by nature, however the subjectivity of including the researcher's own story is further validated by the decolonializing methods that place the indigenous researcher within the context of what constitutes proper knowledge and ways of knowing. The process of decolonializing research must include the critical evaluation of methodologies, and acceptable cultural approaches to the study of Indigenous peoples and their way of life (Marsh, Cote-Meek, Toulouse, Najavits and Young 2015:3). Another key element to decolonialization of the research process, is to remove oneself from the dominant paradigm of research, which is more focused on discovery and interpretation of the meaning associated with this discovery (Marsh, Cote-Meek, Toulouse, Najavits and Young 2015:3). From an Indigenous centered approach, it is also important to be inclusive of the people's views,

emotions, personal experiences with nature, culture and spirit (Marsh, Cote-Meek, Toulouse, Najavits and Young 2015:3).

Indigenous methodologies do not aim to discredit other ways of knowing; one such way of demonstrating the inclusiveness of Indigenous methodologies is to consider the approach called "Two-Eyed Seeing" (Peltier 2018). Mi'kmaw elder Albert Marshal explains two-eyed seeing as a process that views "… learning [as a mechanism] to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing… and learning to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all" (Goulding, Steels, McGarty 2016:787). The grounding fundamental elements of the Two-Eyed Seeing approach acknowledges and recognizes Indigenous knowledge as a distinctive stand-alone epistemological structure, compared to the existing paradigm of the Western science (Marsh, Cote-Meek, Toulouse, Najavits and Young 2015:4). This concept can be directly linked to how research ought not be placed in silos of seclusion, but rather use the different ways of knowing together in order to work on the strengths and lift the weaknesses of the other ways of knowing. Knowledge through the eyes of Indigenous peoples carry a different origin, whereby knowledge can be ancestral in nature. Ancestral knowledge is information passed down from a connection to a cultural association of spirituality (Marsh, Cote-Meek, Toulouse, Najavits and Young 2015:4). The transmission of knowledge can originate from "…dreams, visions, and intuition, and passed down by Elders and knowledge keepers through teachings" (Marsh, Cote-Meek, Toulouse, Najavits and Young 2015:4).

The incorporation of the Two-Eyed Seeing framework has been implemented within this specific research project. This research project on young Indigenous women in Thunder Bay looks at the conceptualizations of safety, which has been approached from both an Indigenous research framework as well as a dominant western research framework. The narrative based interviews allowed for participants to express themselves in an open ended question response; the collaboration between qualitative interviewing methods and the Indigenous recognition of knowledge ownership and validation are engaged in this process. The knowledge is not owned by the researchers, but it is shared and must be returned to the rightful owner. The return of knowledge comes in the form of a validation sharing circle, whereby the knowledge keepers can review the data and make clarifications if misunderstandings happened in the interpretation of their words. The inclusion of sharing circles, also comparable to 'focus groups' have been included within this research project. The basic premise behind sharing circles is that everyone involved, including the facilitator, is viewed as an equal party within the circle, and it is within the circle that knowledge, experiences, story, spirit and emotion are shared amongst the participants (Marsh, Cote-Meek, Toulouse, Najavits and Young 2015:7). Two sharing circles were held in partnership with the project's main community partner, the Ontario Native Women's Association. The first was held to better understand how Indigenous methodologies could best be used in the project. The second dealt more directly with experiences of young Indigenous women living in Thunder Bay and allowed for a self-guided narrative of safe space in the city.

The methods used in the research project, as briefly discussed earlier, included semi-structured interviews and sharing circles. The interviews were arranged in a way that it would not restrict or limit the participants' expression of self within their answers. The interview guide was created by the two graduate students and their research supervisor, Dr. Chris Southcott. The finished guide was then vetted by the research partners, Ontario Native Women's Association and Dr. Patricia McGuire of Carleton University, an Indigenous woman raised in the region. The transparency of the interview guide and its questions ensured that we were asking culturally appropriate questions and respectful of the people whom we were working alongside. We as researchers did not want to create a power dynamic that placed the participants below the researchers, therefore the transparency of the interview process was of utmost importance. Ethics approval was granted by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board on June 20, 2018 (No: 1466531).

The data analysis process of this research project included the use of NVivo Qualitative Analysis software. The interview transcripts were reviewed and adjusted accordingly to what the participants said. Following the transcribing process, the data were coded into conceptual categories using the NVivo software. The coding process started with numerous codes and nodes, however through the process of collapsing similar codes and creating new categories, the final groups emerged in ways not fully envisioned beforehand. The categories were drugs and alcohol, education, history and colonialism, identity, leadership, population demographics, safe space, social issues, Thunder Bay services and violence in Thunder Bay. Each category had sub-categories relating to the

specific overarching theme. For example: the category of drugs and alcohol had sub-categories listed as drug trafficking, overdoses, recreational drug use and substance abuse. The narrative analysis was able to be completed on the themes that reemerged continuously throughout the data findings, as discussed in the data analysis chapter. The major six themes are listed there, the patterns surrounding the core questions, and the data provided with regards to the hopes, dreams and wishes of a good life.

The recruitment process used different methods to approach the population of Indigenous peoples living in the Thunder Bay area. The graduate student researchers set up tables at local events, such as at the Mount McKay powwow, Ontario Native Women's Association events, posters/flyers and Facebook advertising. During our visit to the sacred powwow grounds of Fort William First Nation, it was interesting to note that the older women and men of all ages were much more interested in our project, than the age group we were targeting. One elderly man approached the table, and he discussed how utterly important this project is for our women in Thunder Bay. He mentioned that this research is critical, because of the current situation that many of the youth are facing. Young men also approached the table and spoke in detail about how important this project is, because the women are the leaders of the communities and the ones that are needed to hold our communities together. While attending events around Thunder Bay in hopes of recruiting participants, it was noted that not many young women were interested in speaking with the two graduate students. However, numerous women over the age of 29 did want to participate, and expressed how they had experienced a lot pertaining to the lack of safe spaces living in Thunder Bay, nonetheless they were unable to share their stories due to

the age limitations. Indigenous experiences of safe spaces in Thunder Bay ought not to be confined by age nor gender, however for the purpose of data management and gaps in the research, only the youth voices were chosen for this project. The data generated from the target age group provided ample amounts of data; This approach to age limitations provided a time management strategy for completing this master's thesis by containing an age group to young Indigenous women 18-29 years of age.

Another form of recruitment that was utilized was the use of posters. These posters included the general purpose and goals of the research project, and how one can participate. These posters were distributed to numerous organizations, schools and institutions around Thunder Bay. Organizations ranged from institutional educational support offices, billboards, Indian Friendship Centers, Nishnawbe-Aski Policing Service and so forth. The recruitment outreach from the flyers and posters was not extremely beneficial in terms of recruitment, and did not prove to be the most appropriate way to reach the target age group. The vast majority of participants were recruited through other means, which I describe in the following.

One of the most effective methods utilized for recruitment purposes was the creation and use of a Facebook page. The researchers catered to the target age group and the popular avenue that is social media and networking for recruiting more participants. The Facebook page was titled, "Thunder Bay Safe Space Research Project," and on this page we shared our poster, and received a much higher engagement from individuals. On Facebook, one can share our page on their personal timeline, and by doing so, the audience reach is now viewed on these 4th and 5th level connections. For example, our

page has 707 users who have subscribed to see our posts on their own personal social media accounts. We opted to pay for advertising, meaning that our poster could reach an audience beyond the scope of those who had subscribed to our page. Through paid advertising, one post reached an audience of 6470 people in the Thunder Bay and surrounding areas, and of these 6470 people 93 individuals decided to share our post to their own personal connections. The total 'clicks' on the post was 372. The Facebook page generated 23 individual messages to our private conversations, and from these 23 messages people engaged with the researchers in booking interviews or passing along the information to those who fit the eligibility criteria.

The interview process unfolded over the course of a few months during the fall and winter of 2018. The interviews were held either in a common public space, such as a coffee shop or in a personal residence when the participant was known to the researcher. As such in my case, many of the interviews were held in their own residence, where they felt most at ease to discuss the topics of safety in Thunder Bay. The actual interviews ranged in duration, from thirty minutes to an hour and a half. As researchers, we hoped to have a broad range of experiences and peoples' perspectives on safety in Thunder Bay and we were successful in this regard.

In order to allow for comparisons with other studies, the interview guide itself tried to use standard identification questions such as those used in the Aboriginal Peoples Survey. Although, some of the questions were created to ensure we were able to ask the specific demographic related questions required for this study. For the most part, people understood the questions we asked. Nevertheless, there was some reoccurring issues of

participants answering "I don't know" or "pass" to questions asked of them. There were a few questions that, if there was an opportunity to redo this study, I would suggest be changed or reworded. The question which speaks to registration of the individual with the Indian Act, borrowed from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, did confuse people when posed, however this question is important with regards to conceptualization of identities and government legislation. This specific question could have been reworded to be clearer in the question being posed.

The main enquiries used in discussions around identity were questions 11 through 15 listed on the interview guide. These questions attempted to allow participants to speak to their own understandings of identity, safety, cultural awareness and cultural identity formation. The purpose of these questions were not to lead the participant to any specific response. They were created as an open-response type of answer, encouraging the participants to expand on their thoughts more thoroughly and with greater detail. Examples of open-ended responses to the questions can be seen in the data analysis chapter. The research question was operationalized for the purpose of this research project, to inquire about the relationship between safe spaces in Thunder Bay and individualized notions of subjective identity constructions. This question was posed because identity is a fluid ideology, constantly shifting and reshaping according to the social situations people find themselves in, as explained in the data findings. Cultural identity, as discussed in the literature review, is a concept worth looking into, especially when inquiring about how safe spaces interact with cultural identities among Thunder Bay's young Indigenous population. Therefore, posing the question of: how do notions of

Indigeneity or cultural identity impact visions of what is necessary to create a safe space in an urban context? Furthermore, how do young Indigenous women conceptualize notions of safe space in Thunder Bay, in terms of achieving their hopes, dreams and wishes of a good life?

Several limitations within the research methodology can be identified and are associated with recruitment practices and data validation processes. Upon conception of this research project the original method discussed was to utilize the snowball form of recruitment. The methodology to utilize snowball sampling never materialized as a form of recruitment, as the vast majority of the participants were recruited through other means, especially the use of digital social media.

This project has sought to decolonize the research process and employ Indigenous-centered frameworks throughout the methodology. However, there were some limitations that hindered the desired outcomes. In discussions with the participants, it was stated that as researchers working through an oppressive institution, like that of post-secondary education, that we are in fact creating a separation between 'them' and 'us.' Numerous participants explained how as researchers, we hold a colonialist legacy amongst the Indigenous communities, as such we ought to have established more profound relationships with the participants, beyond that of solely researcher and participant. In other words, it can be understood that regardless of the Indigenous graduate student researcher's approaches to remove the colonial stigma's surrounding research, many participants expressed how they still did not feel we were the right people to share some of their more personal, traumatic and violent experiences endured in Thunder Bay. These

women are already in a more vulnerable situation, as such they did not find that speaking to institutionalized researchers about some of their more hostile memories or experiences was a position that they would like to be placed in. Furthermore, it was expressed that being a researcher with a university does not instill confidence in the participants, as such they did not feel comfortable telling all of their truths with regards to safe space in Thunder Bay.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that throughout the recruitment stage of the project, my personal method of recruitment utilized familial connections to gather information. There will be a larger sample of participants from my home community of Biigtigong Nishinaabeg, due in part to the fact I used a family word of mouth approach and a connection to the educational support officer, in order to reach even more students in the community studying in Thunder Bay.

In conclusion, this research project has been created as a mechanism of decolonization. This approach, as discussed in this chapter, embodies the Two Eyed-Seeing method, whereas the researchers are able to utilize their skills in the most beneficial way, for the people that they are working alongside with, which in this case is the Indigenous youth of Thunder Bay. Indigenous researchers whom are doing Indigenous centered research are walking the line between mainstream western discourses and Indigenous ways of knowing. This research project focused on young Indigenous women in Thunder Bay, and how they conceptualize notions of safety, which has been approached from both an Indigenous research framework as well as a dominant western research framework. A considerable emphasis has been placed on not perpetuating the

dominant oppressive epistemological discourses embedded within modernized academia,

rather to highlight the best and most inclusive aspects, such as how the data was collected

in a story-telling narrative and the data was processed using a narrative thematic analysis.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis & Findings

The research findings for this study have provided ample amounts of useable data well beyond the scope of this thesis. However, for the purpose of this master's thesis, the data used is interconnected with safe space and Indigeneity. The research question looked at how notions of Indigeneity or cultural identity impact visions of what is necessary to create a safe space in an urban context. Furthermore, it looked at how young Indigenous women relate safe space in Thunder Bay to achieving their hopes, dreams and wishes of a good life.

This chapter has been organized thematically, whereas each theme discussed has its own separate section on how it relates directly to the research question. This chapter will speak to the three core questions posed to each participant. This is essential to consider when looking at how these young women understand safe space in relation to their geographic setting. Additionally, it will help understand how safe space affects their own notions of Indigeneity and self-preservation within an urban context. The section of this chapter looks at the core questions of this study, and how safe space is understood by the participants. This section provides an analysis of the participants' beliefs and views surrounding the lack of safe spaces in Thunder Bay. Furthermore, I examine what the young women suggested be done in order to promote positive social change, specifically in terms of how to create safe spaces in Thunder Bay. The themes were extracted from the raw research data through the coding process and reoccurring topics brought up by the participants.

The thematic analysis of the data provided by the participants have been categorized into the subheadings listed below. The section described as 'Participant Characteristics' speaks to the general demographic information pertaining to the research participants, such as their ages, education, employment status and their classification of Indigeneity. The section described as 'Safe Spaces as a Physical Place' addresses how some of the research participants understand safe spaces to be a physical and structural embodiment of safety, such as a program within a building or a safe house for women. The section described as 'Safe Spaces as an Internalized Individualistic Place,' discusses how some of the participants conceptualize how safe spaces can be subjectively understood in terms of individual ideologies of what constitutes safe spaces. Furthermore, it considers how safe space can be understood as a process of creating a safe environment within one's own self, through a strong cultural identity, and self-acceptance. The section described as 'White-Washing Indigenous Identities,' speaks to how notions of Indigeneity are related to and struggle with the colonial mechanism of 'white-washing,' whereby altering the very characteristics that help stabilize Indigenous-based identities. The section labelled as 'A Stronger Cultural Identity Equates a Higher Sense of Belonging' speaks to how Identity is constructed through, and maintained by, participation in cultural activities. Indigeneity is interconnected with one's personal association to Indigenous ways of life and world views, such as one's relationship to the land, the language, or the traditional teachings. The section labelled as 'Safe Spaces and Reliable Transportation' discusses how one's accessibility to reliable transportation in and around the city of Thunder Bay is directly associated with the level of safety experienced by the youth participants. Lastly,

the section labelled as 'Cultural Safe Spaces Promote Healthy Lifestyle Choices for

Indigenous Peoples' highlight how Indigeneity is constructed within safe spaces, and

maintained through sobriety and healthy lifestyle choices.

Participant Characteristics

The 31 young Indigenous women that participated in the research project all came from

their own unique and different perspectives. The youngest participant was 21 years of age

and the oldest participant was 29 years old. The average age for the participants within the

study was 25.5 years old.

There was not a large variation among the research participants in terms of the

typology of Indigenous-based classification. As illustrated in Table 1, it shows the

breakdown of how the participants self-identified. Of the 31 participants, as illustrated in

the graph, there were two Metis youth, one non-respondent and 28 First Nations women.

Table 1: Self-Identification Pie Chart of Indigeneity
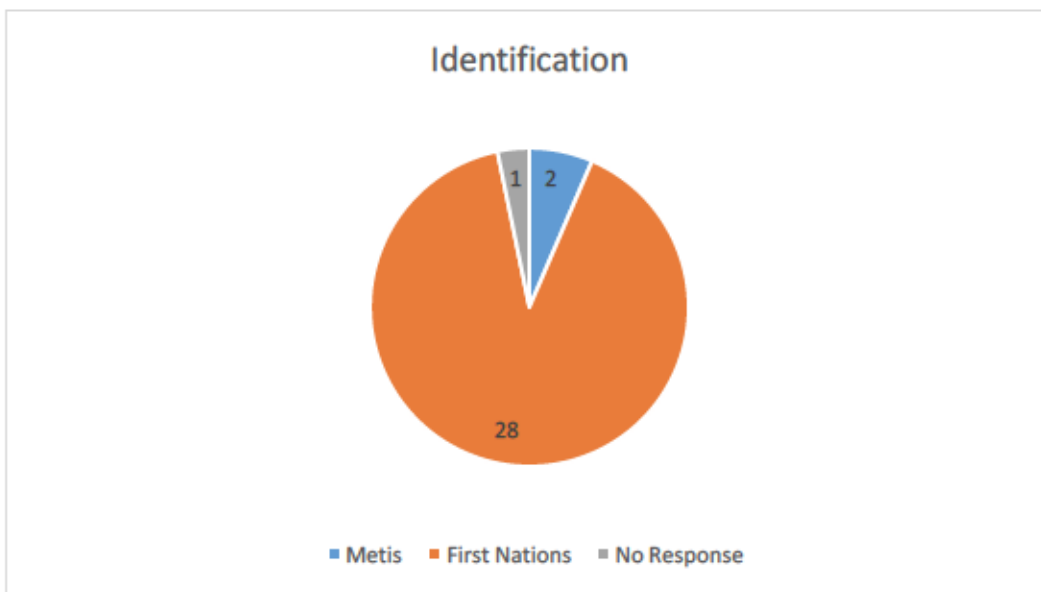
In Table Two, it shows the employment status of the 31 participants. Many participants did not directly speak as to whether or not they were employed, however some did mention they worked or wished to be employed in the future. Some participants mentioned they were students and did not hold employment.

Table Two: Employment Status
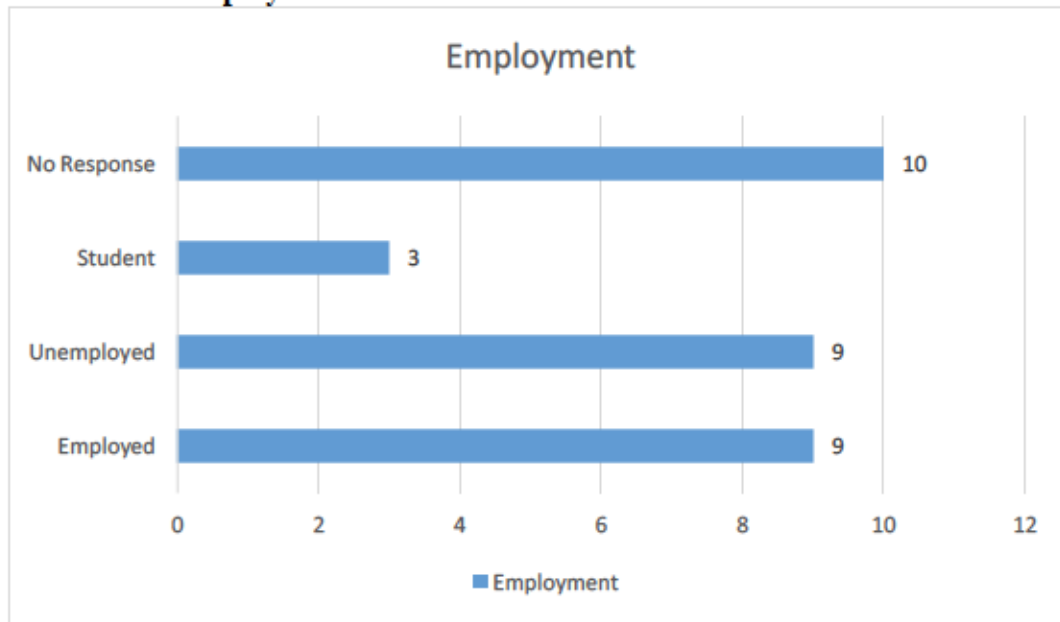
As illustrated in Table Three, of the 31 participants, their living situations varied greatly. Five youth discussed being home owners, thirteen youth mentioned renting their current accommodations, five youth spoke about how they lived with their families, no one spoke about renting a room or hostel, five youth discussed being homeless and living in a temporary shelter and three youth did not respond to the question.

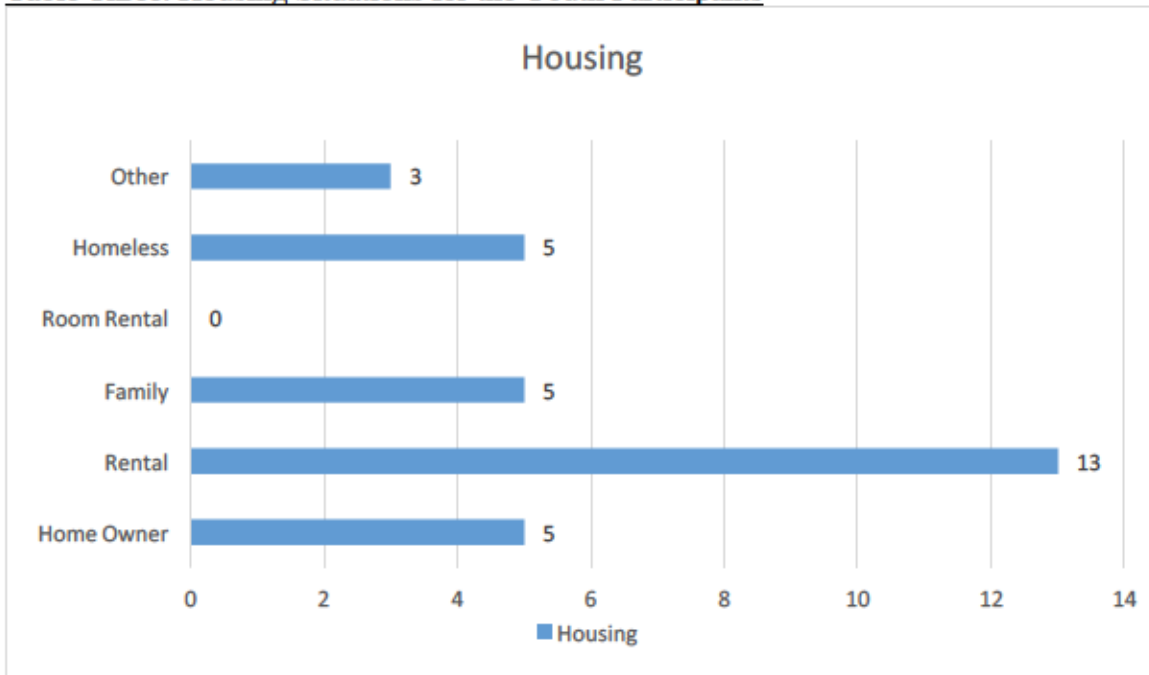Table Three: Housing Situations for the Youth Participants

Table Four shows the highest educational degree achieved among the 31 research participants. Three youth discussed never completing a grade school education, ten youth mentioned only achieving a high school degree, four youth have graduated from a college program, and eleven youth have completed a post-secondary education. Three youth did not respond to this question.

Table Four: Highest Education Obtained
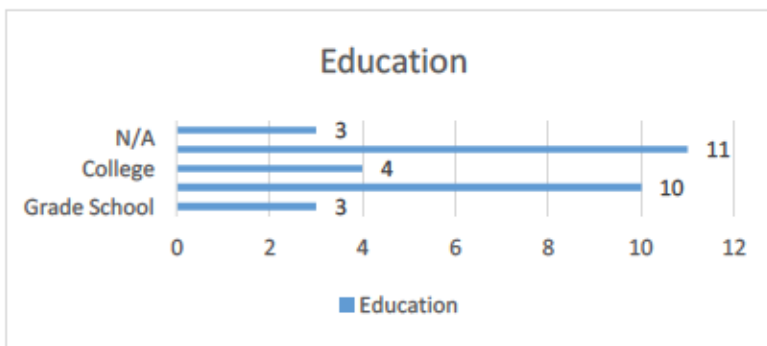
The Analysis of the Core Questions: Is Thunder Bay currently a safe space for young Indigenous women? Why?"

The core questions behind this research project were created to assess and comprehend how young Indigenous women understand the concept of safe space; how achieving safe space can be limited through societal and individualistic barriers; and lastly, what ought to be done to create a safe space in Thunder Bay for young Indigenous women. The three questions are important to consider in terms of how it relates to creating a safe space for young Indigenous women to express their true selves. Indigeneity, as discussed previously, is contingent upon safe space, therefore the participants have answered the three core questions pertaining to their understanding of Thunder Bay's social situation and how it affects their notions of safety in an urban context.

The participants were asked, "is Thunder Bay currently a safe space for young Indigenous women? Why?" and the responses varied person-to-person, as life experiences are subjective and dependent on their social situation within society. Safety has been described by the study participants in many different ways, and how safety largely depends on their own lived experiences and social locations. Despite differences amongst the participants, Thunder Bay was discussed, nearly unanimously, as a dangerous city for not only Indigenous women, but all women to live in.

Many participants described Thunder Bay as a city of racism, hatred, addictions, gangs, crime and death. Regardless of one's social situation, many young women described their understanding of safety in Thunder Bay in accordance with their own accessibility to reliable transportation. Such transportation allows for the women to stay away from dangerous streets and areas of town, and making it easier to achieve and

maintain their own sobriety by avoiding the wrong crowds. However, many participants also made mention of how numerous people who are struggling with substance abuse issues are harmed by the imposition of colonial systems, such as residential schools. This has created intergenerational trauma, and a cycle of abuse and familial dysfunction, leading youth to alcohol and drugs as a way to cope. One youth discussed how young Indigenous women are targeted, and more vulnerable to fall victim to the human trafficking ring (RS, Interview, November 10 2018). Another youth also alluded to how Indigenous women in Thunder Bay are more targeted by gangs. These youths then get hooked on drugs and are pushed into the underground human trafficking network that runs rampant in the city (BW, Interview, November 22 2018). She discussed how these illegal organizations would pamper the women, trick them with materialistic items, or hook them on drugs to ensure they remain a part of this cycle of addictions and sex-work (BW, Interview, November 22 2018). Another youth emphasized how "our women and children are being taken into the sex trade at such high numbers. Our babies are disappearing at the ports and no one seems to be talking about that. The sex trade ring is a real and huge problem, but it goes undiscussed" (RB, Interview, September 8 2018). She raised a very important point about why young Indigenous women's lives are undervalued compared to their white-settler counterpart here in Thunder Bay.

The on-going issue of physical violence and racism in the city is another aspect discussed by nearly all of the participants. Whether or not they are white-passing youth or not, respondents discussed how Indigenous peoples are predisposed to, and experience, greater forms of discrimination, racism and race-fueled hate crimes in Thunder Bay. One

youth discussed how experiencing these forms of trauma is not only felt on an individual level, but it transcends across generations, and the pain is transmitted vicariously through experience to experience from parent-to-child, grandparent-to-child and so forth. She explained how it extends from person to person:

> So you might not have experienced that verbal assault yourself, but when you when you hear about it you're like, oh my god, like that actually hurts to hear that you've experienced that, or that your daughter can't even walk to her car at night without worrying about getting raped by someone, like these things that just come up, right. That you feel their pain and the [fear] through their story (AB I, Interview, December 2 2018).

Another youth discussed how the race-related violence her grandmother experienced was directly experienced by her, as a child, and internalized as race related hatred stemming from her skin color and identity as an Anishinaabekwe (AB II, Interview, September 8 2018). A youth participant discussed how it is a cross-section between sexism and racism, and through this interaction Indigenous women are targeted solely because they are minority status women (CH, Interview, September 7 2018). Being an Indigenous woman is also further disadvantaged through colonialism and systemic barriers in achieving a sense of safety amongst themselves and their families. She explained how Indigenous women are easier targets for people with bad intentions, because she alluded to how people are not "…going to listen to their stories or people aren't going to care if you do something to them, and I think that makes people that might have bad intentions target them, because you hear the news about women going to the police and not having anything done about it" (CH, Interview, September 7 2018). She went on to explain how victim blaming Indigenous women to relocate the responsibility from the perpetrators to the victims removes the shock-factor of these crimes. She explained how you hear stories

about how "…women [are] being told that you shouldn't have been walking down the street if you didn't want this happening, and I think that devaluing of Indigenous women really puts them in a place where people think it's okay to enact the violence against them" (CH, Interview, September 7 2018).

Other youth participants explained how they have directly experienced situations where themselves or their infant children were violently affected by race-related incidents, such as how this mom and her newborn child were walking down Mackenzie Street, and a car rolled down their window to yell racial slurs, and then they threw a pop-can at them and hit her infant (SB, Interview, September 25 2018). These are not isolated incidents, nor are they acts of coincidence, these are reoccurring race-fueled actions, which is a direct reflection of how a large group of Thunder Bay residents devalue and dehumanize Indigenous people to the extent of committing hate-crimes and violence upon them and their families. A youth summarized how safety in Thunder Bay is non-existent and very problematic, she recounted how safety is interconnected with devaluing and dehumanizing Indigenous peoples. She explained how here:

> In no way, shape or form is Thunder Bay safe for Indigenous people, period. It's not just the women, its everyone. Our people are not safe here. Our people are not looked out for here. Our people are dying here. It isn't even just the river that is killing our people… it's not just the drinking or drugs that is killing our people… go sit down in the hospital, just go sit there and watch how our women, children and men are treated there. There is no respect. There was even an elder who went to the hospital to seek medical help, they thought she was like just another drunk Indian and ignored and disregarded entirely. She ended up being diabetic and died in the hospital. You hear these stories so frequently now…We are all people, we all deserve the same respect, but like we are the ones suffering and dying at the hands of everyone else. It has to do with safety in general… Why are we not talking about the sex trade? Why are we not talking about the missing and murdered first nations? Why are we not talking about systematic violence? Hell, why are we not talking about the social services? You always hear about children

being taken away, without cause, and they keep doing it. These are issues that are always swept under the rug, because we don't matter in the eyes of the system (RB, Interview, September 8 2018).

She explained how systematic barriers and social-system failures have put many Indigenous people in an unfavorable situation (RB, Interview, September 8 2018). There are numerous factors that affect how Indigenous people can access services, programs, supports and remove the barriers that affect their ability to access and implement safety and security in a physical, social, spiritual and emotional sense.

Achieving safe spaces in Thunder Bay for young Indigenous women is an on-going struggle, as described by nearly every participant. Some participants alluded to how their white-passing appearance may make Thunder Bay safe for them in general, however the reality of the situation is much more severe for their visibly Indigenous counterparts. Indigeneity is developed through the safe spaces people find themselves in, whereby it creates the safe environment to practice the elements that make up Indigenous identities, such as cultural immersion through traditional practices and activities. Identities are continuously challenged through the lack of safe spaces in Thunder Bay, and it is through this process that it poses a threat to maintaining strong, vibrant and resiliently immersed through cultured-based identities.

The Analysis of the Core Questions: What is Preventing Thunder Bay from Being a Safe Space for Young Indigenous Women?"

The second core question that the participants discussed was, "what is preventing Thunder Bay from being a safe space for young Indigenous women?" There are many barriers and limitations that were discussed in relation to achieving a safe space in Thunder Bay for young Indigenous women. The pattern that emerged surrounded the

epidemic of chronic substance abuse and alcoholism. It is a major barrier that many face when attempting to create and maintain a safe space for themselves and others around them.

One youth explained how alcohol is the number one issue that is preventing Thunder Bay from achieving a safe space for young Indigenous women. She continued to rationalize her opinion further by explaining how, "…alcohol is really bad right now. I'm pretty sure it's bad everywhere. Like even on social media, you see these kids talking about, 'oh I blacked out last weekend, it was so much fun. I don't even remember what I did'" (CM, Interview, November 7 2018). This youth participant explained how alcohol consumption, even with minors and the youth population, is very troublesome, and that this type of behaviour is learned and internalized as the norm from the adults in their lives (CM, Interview, November 7 2018).

Another youth described the limitations that impede on achieving safe spaces is opioids and other substance abuse issues that Thunder Bay is continuously battling with (AB II, Interview, September 8 2018). She also alluded to how Indigenous peoples who fall into the category of substance users, they are then reduced to something below human and they are undervalued within society (AB II, Interview, September 8 2018). She recounted how she has heard discussions pertaining to those who get pulled from the river, dead or alive, are dehumanized to an extent that their lives do not matter to the rest of the society. She also stated that she has heard people say that they deserved this outcome and they brought it upon themselves due to their life choices and engagement with particular substances (AB II, Interview, September 8 2018).

There were discussions pertaining to how Thunder Bay is divided into two distinctive groups, "us and them", and through this division of Indigenous peoples and Euro-settlers, it further disrupts the process of creating balance and harmony across the city. It is through the lack of education and awareness of the true history of the First Nations peoples of Canada, and the stereotypical rhetoric that continuously creates and reinforces boundaries and barriers that impede on creating safe spaces in Thunder Bay.

There are numerous educational and institutional barriers that prevent people from achieving and living with that sense of safety and security in Thunder Bay. One youth explained how these systematic barriers are deeply connected and rooted within our modern society, and how these hierarchical systems are limiting peoples access from creating or accessing safety in their daily lives. This youth explained how "we bring cultural spaces into our institutions, it is not as safe, because we are not allowed to actually express how you feel, or you are not able to express who you are in these spaces, because of the institutional guidelines [they] are not inclusive. It bleeds from institutions" (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). She alluded to how the creation of these safe spaces as a collective community with similar outlooks and aspirations for social change is a possible way to move past the barriers. She also explained how "it is that attitude, that idea that we look out into Thunder Bay, and we see very specific things, and they all require money" (CG, Interview, December 2 2018), and that consumerism is at the very foundation of societal social change, which ought to be reconstructed in a more inclusive way to social system transformation.

The barriers and limitations many youth face in Thunder Bay is remarkable, in the sense that their white-settler counterparts do not have the same social, political and economic disadvantages. These societal forms of oppression and mechanisms of disadvantage ultimately detriment the Indigenous populations at unprecedented proportions, as discussed by the participants. As discussed previously, this societal disadvantage and combination of substance abuse coping mechanisms severely inhibits and destroys many aspects of the one's Indigeneity and participation in cultural practices.

The Analysis of the Core Questions: What would you recommend be done to help Thunder Bay become a safe space for young Indigenous women?

The third and final core question that participants discussed asked, "what would you recommend be done to help Thunder Bay become a safe space for young Indigenous women?" Recommendations varied from participant to participant, however many suggested that for social change to happen, specifically in a racially divided city like Thunder Bay, it must happen simultaneously on an individual and collective level. One youth participant alluded to how she recommends social change start as an action, a progressive action, due to change not being able to occur if you only talk about it. She explained how "a collective of people that come together that raise these concerns [can start creating a social change]. Because it's all fine and dandy for me to sit here and tell you this needs to get done and that needs to get done, but it's not going to get done. Because we need more than just one person... It's a collective of people that make the change..." (AB I, Interview, December 2 2018). Small groups of likeminded people that come together with similar values and concerns can create the

platform for a social movement, much like that of many Indigenous lead grassroots movements, such as Idle No More or Bear Clan Patrol. These social groups have similar visions and goals – they work to create a safe environment for all people to live in harmony with one and other.

Another recommendation for change made by a youth was the ability to use their voice, every day and at every opportunity, to speak up against the oppressors and colonizers of modern day society. The ability to use a voice in order to advocate for those who has been silenced through the oppressive mechanisms of the colonialist rhetoric and social agenda of assimilation is absolutely pivotal when pursing social change (DD, Interview, September 6 2018). Using a voice when one is in a position of privilege, in order to use that social location as a platform for those to listen to the words you speak, is not only what ought to be done, it is what is required for societal reform. Even those individuals who are suppressed by the institutional and systemic forces, when those individuals bring forth their ancestral knowledge and voice, they cannot be silenced when speaking. As one youth stated so boldly, "[be] a strong, loud, unapologetic woman" when you face adversity and the harsh tongue of racially perpetuated discrimination and hatred (DD, Interview, September 6 2018). Being a strong, loud and unapologetic woman also requires that one does not cower in the face of threats, does not bow or bend to pressure and is representative of a strength so fierce it will not break, because it is rooted deeply within our culture and tradition as the Nations' women (DD, Interview, September 6 2018).

Another youth recommended that for Thunder Bay to become a safer city, she believed that as a society, we ought to challenge the systemic issues that are on-going within this geographic area. She expressed that, "there is a lot of direct racism and violence, but I think a lot of it is just what's being taught in our school systems [in Thunder Bay]" (CH, Interview, September 7 2018). She explained how these disadvantages that many face in the city, they restrict and limit the individual growth of a person (CH, Interview, September 7 2018). She also alluded to how as a society, "we don't always value the First People of these lands, and it already sets people up to be seen as lesser. I think if we challenged more of those policies and systems in place that people would feel more valued, more open, and would be given a little bit more dignity. And I think if you see somebody as a person. It's a lot harder to enact violence against them" (CH, Interview, September 7 2018).

Other youth participants highlighted how indulging in and living by a cultural protocol is what they recommend be done, in order to create and maintain a safer Thunder Bay. They explained how safety to them is directly connected to their cultural identity and how they are able to access and practice their cultural traditions, ceremony or activities. They explained how engaging in more traditional activities, such as sharing circles, powwows or accessing and participating in culturally appropriate programming creates a safer city for them to live in.

The recommendations for how to create a safer Thunder Bay are another puzzle piece required to completed the larger picture, that is understanding how identities are contingent upon safe spaces. If a city is not safe, how can it be changed to create these

safe environments. Identity constructions, as discussed in great detail throughout this paper, is created through and maintained within these safe spaces; this is especially the case in the responses of Thunder Bay's young Indigenous women study participants.

<div align="center">Safe Spaces as a Physical Place</div>

The data spoke to how safe space can be defined as a physical place, building or location that can be touched, seen, utilized and accessed by the public. One of first themes that had emerged from that data was how safe spaces in Thunder Bay for young Indigenous women can be understood as a physical place. It is something objective by nature, such as the safe space of a women's shelter in Thunder Bay. This physical safe space is representative as a structural embodiment of safety, whereas the youth can access it, touch it, see it and hear what it means to be a safe place.

Many participants discussed how this safe space can be understood as a physical and structural place where an individual can go, that does not require consumerism, and promotes healthy relationships and lifestyle choices. As one participant indicated, in Thunder Bay we need more "… supports available for people, [so we can turn] it into some type of social gathering space. Having more public spaces that are indoors, inviting and welcoming are so important. We need more of those type of spaces for Indigenous peoples to feel welcome and spend time together without consumerism" (CC, Interview, December 2 2018). The participant highlighted a key factor when discussing the true lived experiences of many who come to Thunder Bay to access its urban city services, such as medical, education or support systems. Whether these individuals are here for a day, week, month or a longer temporary duration, these visitors that access Thunder Bay's services are generally restricted to the income they have budgeted for their duration of

stay. While many of these youth visitors who come to Thunder Bay to access services are far-away from their home communities, and "[no] one is giving you a $100 bill and saying go buy all three meals for the day, and you're expected to stay in the accommodation provided for your medical stay, which is often far away from the downtown cores. So, what are you supposed to do with your time? What is free in Thunder Bay? Unfortunately, not a lot is free" (CC, Interview, December 2 2018), as explained by a youth participant. This participant raised vital key points to consider when discussing the reality many young Indigenous peoples face when leaving their home communities in order to access Thunder Bay for its essential services. The issue of safe space in terms of transient visitors who access essential services in Thunder Bay is an issue worth mentioning, whereby the lack of safe spaces, which do not require consumerism, inhibits one's ability to promote a safe space within the city for youth to access.

Many of these youth do not have the financial means to entertain themselves in spaces, such as the mall, the movies, bowling alley or different restaurants. As such, many youths face the predominant question of, 'what do I do in Thunder Bay with no money, and where can I go that does not cost anything?' Another participant emphasized similar points of interest, indicating that the only way to truly create a safe space is to unilaterally come together as a collective unit and look into creating safe spaces that do not require money. She stated that "it is this idea that safe spaces require money. Like people think, 'oh we need a space for that', [therefore] we need money for that [space]. It is the idea that everywhere should be safe" (CG, Interview, December 2 2018), and that every city

should offer safe spaces that do not require monetary restrictions on entry. Safe spaces ought not be simply a place, building, activity or program that requires consumerism to participate within, safe spaces ought to reflect the reality that many do not have the means to occupy themselves with expensive meals, movie theaters, malls or city excursions.

Other participants raised awareness around the issue of safe spaces as a physical building to access, such as shelters, that cater to the Indigenous population specifically. Safe spaces in Thunder Bay were understood to be a place where people can go (BW, Interview, November 22 2018). A youth highlighted that this city is missing an essential service that caters to the different needs and outlooks of Indigenous peoples, especially when serving extremely oppressed groups like the homeless Indigenous population. She explained how a separate safe space in the form of a shelter is required for the, "…Indigenous women…especially the ones who might be using [substances], or are in that [lifestyle]" (BW, Interview, November 22 2018), because these women are already experiencing numerous forms of overlapping oppression and structural violence from the systematic failures of social assistance programming. These separate facilities that cater to the specific needs of Indigenous women in Thunder Bay would increase the level of comfort experienced by those who access the services, it would allow for Indigenous women to rebuild and reclaim their own self-esteem (BW, Interview, November 22 2018). This process would ideally restore the women's ability to heal and promote positive lifestyle choices.

Other suggestions were offered in the form of creating a publicly accessible location for people to drop in and access programs and services, however not in the form

of a shelter run organization. Another participant suggested that having more services available for the women of Thunder Bay would promote positive change (MT, Interview, October 26 2018). The services must be catered to the specific issues many Indigenous women face, such as access to culturally appropriate forms of counseling, which is a large gap in social services (MT, Interview, October 26 2018).

A different perspective of physical safe spaces was brought forth by another participant, she understood the notion of safe spaces as pivotal to their own personal privilege (AB I, Interview, December 2 2018). To explain this concept further, consider the social phenomenon of white-washed identities; white-passing Indigenous people can view themselves in relation to their multi-cultural heritage, whereby the colonial superpowers are limiting their conceptualizations of indigeneity. This concept of white-washing identities will be discussed in greater detail later on. However, in the context of physical safe spaces and white-washed cultural identities it is important to consider the notion of privilege associated with being 'white-passing', and the two-worlds one is able to see into. These particular participants described their up-bringing as privileged in the sense of their multi-cultural backgrounds and white-passing appearances to the on-looking world (CG, Interview, December 2 2018; AB I, Interview, December 2 2018). She emphasized how for her personally, safety is interpreted very differently based on those white-passing characteristics (AB I, Interview, December 2 2018). It is important to note that when one is to think about safe space, a youth mentioned that "[safe spaces as a] physical embodiment, I would say [that there is] not a lot of places that you could go to…You have your schools, but that's an institution itself. You have these um, other

organizations like businesses, but once again they're institutions" (AB I, Interview,

December 2 2018). Furthermore, she made mention of how safety is integral upon how

the outside world views and analyzes your appearance in relation to identities, and how

European-looking Indigenous individuals have less oppression placed upon them than

their visibly representative counterparts.

One such example of this can be understood in how one 27-year-old

Indigenous youth recounted how her grandmother always told her that, "…because I don't

look [Indigenous], I got lucky" (AB II, Interview, September 8 2018). She explained how

her grandmother, who is visibly recognizable as Indigenous faced many hardships, such

as someone trying to run her over with a car, having rocks thrown at her from moving

vehicles, and having eggs tossed at her. She recounted how "sometimes when I would

walk with my Grandmother, I would grab her hand, because it just got so bad.

Fortunately, I am lighter skinned. They don't see me as Aboriginal – they don't see me as

a threat. I've had a better life than most Aboriginal people" (AB II, Interview, September

8 2018). She later explained that as a white-passing Indigenous youth, she has never

experienced the forms of race-driven violence that her grandmother has lived through.

Cultural identities are constructed and maintained through safe spaces, therefore the

young Indigenous women in Thunder Bay are constantly facing barriers that impede on

and limit their accessibility to these physical safe spaces. Indigeneity in Thunder Bay is

hinged upon safe spaces, and the lack thereof further disadvantages many already

oppressed minority groups, such as Indigenous women.

Safe Spaces as an Internalized Individualistic Place

Safe space can also be defined as not solely a physical embodiment of a building or structure, but rather how safe space is understood in a subjective and individualized manner. Safe space is individualized to each and every participant, and it is specifically explained by their conceptualizations of safety in relation to themselves, in a personal and subjective way. A youth explained how "… it is the idea that we take safe spaces as being physical, only limits us. We really have to broaden our ideas of what safe space is" (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). She continues to expand on how the interconnection between inner-safe space must also be in conjunction with physical, as a well-balanced duo, she explained how safe spaces ought to be thought of beyond the confines of physical and personal, and explore why we cannot have safety on a communal level of our people. One ultimately cannot have a safe physical space without the corresponding inner-personal safe space, and through the bonding of these two safe spaces, one can start to create a safe community network of people in that specific area. A youth explained that, "wherever the community resides, it ought to be safe" (CG, Interview, December 2 2018).

Another youth emphasized how safety to her can be understood as combination between physical and personal elements, whereby highlighting how:

> [Safety] to me is being able to talk freely and openly and not feel like you're being restricted in a way. That you can have a voice and an opinion and not [be reprimanded for] having that voice. I feel in a lot of institutional places that you don't get the voice that you want without the consequences that come with having an opinion. So, a safe place for me is a safe place to have those free conversations, those non-restricted conversations to express yourself as who you are, and not fear the outcomes of that. It's not so much a physical place but a safe place within yourself and within other people that you're with. A social safe place" (AB I, Interview, December 2 2018).

Safe spaces can be understood as how individuals internalize their own personal identities and sense of belonging to a specific group, such as the concept of Indigeneity among the research participants. The sense of belonging and personal acceptance of oneself is important to consider, mainly because it speaks to how one copes with their own self-esteem and social pressures. One such example of this is how white-passing Indigenous youth discussed how they, in certain situations, withhold information pertaining to their Indigeneity, in order to safe-guard themselves from potential discrimination or racism related incidents. Therefore, reiterating how youth have alluded to how safe spaces are also subjective and individualized. In other words, safe spaces are created and maintained within themselves. A strong, powerful and resilient sense of Indigeneity among the research participants can be understood as a foundational element for internal safe spaces when discussing urban cities, like Thunder Bay.

White-Washing Indigenous Identities

There is overlap between individualized notions of safe spaces, and how it relates to identity formation, specifically for those who are 'white-passing', and struggle with the colonial mechanisms of 'white-washing' characteristics of Indigenous based-identities (Downey 2018). Many of the participants defined and discussed in great detail this notion of 'white-passing' and 'white-washing' of identity. The concept of white-passing can be understood as an individual who despite their fair skinned appearance, claims some type of Indigenous heritage, whether it be First Nations, Metis, Inuit or any other typology of Indigenous-based classification. White-passing Indigenous individuals, as previously mentioned, experience the social world in a multitude of different ways, therefore they

generally do not experience the same degree of social exclusion and discriminatory

practices as their visibility Indigenous-counterparts. The construction of their personal

identities is situated around how these white-passing Indigenous peoples situate

themselves in both worlds, that of the minority and that of the majority.

Some participants utilized their white-washed identities as a survival tactic when

faced with discrimination, racism or violence. When surrounded by likeminded people,

she explained that:

> It is easy to feel proud of who you are and where you come from. When you're put
> back into the real world, it is hard when you hear a lot of racist rhetoric, and you
> don't want to necessarily be lumped in with what people are saying. And so even
> if you're not trying to dislike yourself, you're not trying to hide who you are. Part
> of it's almost like a survival tactic, that you have to almost distance yourself a bit
> just to try and get through the day, because otherwise you're going to let all of
> those horrible things eat away at you" (CH, Interview, September 7 2018).

It is through this concept of white-passing that she, and many others, were able to distance

themselves from the harsh reality that many visibly Indigenous peoples cannot push away

from. She described how negative assumptions, discrimination and sheer systematic

violence affected an elderly Indigenous woman in Walmart. She explained how "… [this

elderly] woman fell and hit her head. So, me and my mom wanted to help her and we

were telling the story that she hit her head really hard, and you should call an ambulance,

and they said, 'no she's probably just drunk'" (CH, Interview, September 7 2018). The

reality of the situation is that many Indigenous peoples are labelled through stereotypical

assumptions, and dehumanized to the point of the removal of their basic human dignity

and respect.

Safety, as mentioned previously, is directly related to the color of one's skin, whereas acceptance among the Thunder Bay population is based-upon their degree of whiteness, and if they were not white-passing, they would not be accepted, nor apart of the Thunder Bay community. A participant mentioned that, "[it is] the idea is that our systems are just failing..." (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). Thus, highlighting how it becomes more dangerous for young Indigenous women, because they fall into that oppressed minority group. Therefore, this youth argued how "...if you have colour to your skin, if you are a woman, if you are anything that is considered less than, you are then a target of some sort, because there is going to be less of a presence. The fact we are talking about safe spaces suggests that we live in a society that isn't safe" (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). White-passing constructionist views of identity are in direct relationship with individual notions of safety among the participants, especially in terms of safety from race-driven acts of physical violence and societal disadvantages.

The concept of Indigeneity is constantly challenged within our society, through numerous colonial systems of assimilation, such as the Indian Act (1985). These systems of governmental and societal interference interact with how individuals understand their own Indigeneity. This is especially the case in relation to the outside world, which is influenced constantly by criteria of eligibility, in other words, what constitutes what a proper 'Indian' in our modern society ought to look like, act like and behave as. These different considerations of identity formation amongst the Indigenous population continuously impose expectations surrounding their sense of belonging and white-washing the Indigeneity from their creation and maintenance of identities. Ultimately, in

other words, removing the 'Indian' from the person, as the goal is to assimilate the entire population into the Canadian melting pot of mosaics (Palmater 2011).

Indigenous peoples are under constant scrutiny from the public and institutional eye, whether it be from the stereotypes we as a nation carry upon our backs; the discrimination we as a nation internalize and normalize, in order to safe guard our pride and dignity on a daily basis. Or simply, assimilating to the expectations of what a 'good Indian' means, and how to not stand out in a form of identity reclamation rebellion against the status quo. A youth participant stated how "people have called me a 'good Indian', or 'I'm doing the right thing'. I behave properly, how they think I am supposed to be behave. Or that I'm not a 'real Indian', because I don't live in a teepee'" (CW, Interview, September 6 2018). The social pressures to conform into the standardized box of accepted behaviour is an on-going battle many face, whereas, they must continuously grapple with the question of whether or not the push-back will out-weigh potential confrontational consequences. Another youth emphasized how her willingness to self-identify, as a white-passing Anishinaabekwe, is dependent upon the social setting, whereas, she must justify the potential consequences of her decision to self-identity in a way that could place her in an unfavorable situation (CC, Interview, December 2 2018).

Another youth explained how her white-passing outwards appearance places her in a situation where people express very derogatory and racist statements to her, and expect her reaction to be in favour of their opinions, due in part to her fair-skinned appearance. She explained how, "I'm pretty assertive and I'll say, 'look that's not okay, I'm Indigenous, and I don't appreciate you [saying] that'. There's times where you're in a

situation where somebody is very aggressive or very strong in their views, [and] you're almost scared to admit that, because you don't want to put yourself in a position where you feel like you're being targeted or attacked" (CH, Interview, September 7 2018). It ultimately boils down to, for this youth, the potential engagement with confrontational and aggressive people outweighs the opportunity to speak her voice in a safe space, whereas she stated, "it's easier to deny that part of you to preserve yourself and to preserve that dignity" (CH, Interview, September 7 2018).

Another white-passing Indigenous woman explained how she too benefits from white-privilege in the sense that she is not automatically stereotyped and discriminated against solely due to her fair-skin (CW, Interview, September 6 2018). However, she expressed how "… white people often say really racist things to me. So it can be difficult when you're in a group, [and after they've] said terrible things, [and] you say 'I'm indigenous'" (CW, Interview, September 6 2018). There seems to be a constant struggle between self-identification of Indigeneity among those who are white-passing, due in part to a mechanism of self-preservation against hostility and the potential for race related forms of violence.

One participant explained that she is easily classifiable as white by onlookers, however she is deemed favourable when people learn of her white-passing Indigenous identity, due in part to her high standard of educational background, her professional work ethic and her overall welcoming personality (TC, Interview, September 6 2018). She explained how she is "not an easy target to pick on…its easier for them to accept someone who is more like them, if that makes sense" (TC, Interview, September 6 2018). She

essentially explained how her acceptance in Thunder Bay's community is based upon her fitting into the category of 'non-Indigenous' by looks, and that she does lose pieces of her own cultural identity throughout that process of assimilation. She also made mention to how she feels like a posterchild for employers or institutions that find out through self-identification of her Indigeneity. She explained how she is the posterchild, and "… [they have expressed how] we have an Aboriginal with us and someone likes to show you off" (TC, Interview, September 6 2018). Her level of social acceptance and sense of belonging in Thunder Bay is reflective of her fair-skin tone and her remarkable educational and professional accomplishments, as she explained allowed her to become a representative of companies meeting their racially diverse hiring quotas.

Another youth explained how she is very proud to be Anishinabekwe, and it is directly connected to her identity. Her Indigeneity was held from her for many years, because she grew up in a society that shamed Indigenous peoples and placed labels and stereotypes on those who identified, either visibly or orally as such. She explained how "I was brought up to be ashamed of being Indigenous. I grew up to be like, 'no you don't want to be an Indigenous woman, because it's bad" (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). It has all these stereotypes that I am talking about…It was also that sense of shame that came from residential schools". However, she decided to throw away the negative stigmas, stereotypes and find pride in her history, because after she "…identified with the pieces that are good, that we forget about, that was taken over periods of time, like our spirituality, that's how I am today" (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). She speaks directly to how she is on a journey to reclaim her Indigenous identity and practice it as an

Anishinaabekwe woman, without being fearful of the societal consequences. She is

challenging the social system and holding her spirituality as her center pin for strength to

overcome any obstacle.

The colonialist regime has continued to white-wash Indigenous identities,

therefore generating a rift in how one self-identifies, consequently creating seclusions of

who is 'Indian enough' to be 'Indian'. Cultural identities are continuously challenged in

society, as discussed by the participants, thus affecting one's sense of belonging and sense

of acceptance within society. White-passing Indigenous youth are constantly evaluating

whether or not it is a safe space to self-identify, speak up against discrimination or

stereotypical rhetoric for fear of reprimand or attacks of violence.

A Stronger Cultural Identity Equates a Higher Sense of Belonging

Identity is also constructed through and maintained by culturally grounded activities

within Indigenous communities. The data suggested that Indigeneity is directly connected

with one's personal association to the Indigenous ways of life and world views. The

relationship between Indigeneity and cultural immersion is paramount when discussing

the notion of safe spaces in Thunder Bay. As previously discussed, safe spaces are

contingent upon one's cultural identity and through women's roles as leaders within

families and communities (OWNA 2017), the construction and development of

Indigeneity is based within culture. Culture is the main focal point of this section, and

how cultural immersion creates stronger ties to one's sense of Indigeneity.

A strong connection to the land is another element that ought to be considered

when discussing culturally grounding components of Indigeneity. Active engagement

with land-based activities demonstrate a stronger sense of Indigeneity, therefore

highlighting how safe spaces are required to achieve a sense of cultural identity. An Anishinaabekwe explained how she "does not define home as a general city or town, but rather [home as] the whole landscape of Northwestern Ontario" (AB I, Interview, December 2 2018). Home is not a city, town or community, but rather home is the traditional lands and waterways of the Robinson Superior Treaty Lands. She highlighted how "my spirituality is tied to the land. I have a great sense of connection when [I am] out on the land and when [I am] harvesting wild meat, and when I am out harvesting fish…I am out there practicing what I have learned… and being able to act responsibly on the land, to respect the animals and the cycles" (AB I, Interview, December 2 2018). This connection between woman and land is sacred in a sense of how she interacts with the land and the food provided to her from the land and from the earth. The respect of the cycles and animals are in a direct relationship with her cultural identity as an Anishinaabekwe.

Another Anishinabekwe explained how her cultural identity is also in a direct relationship with the land. Her connection to the land runs along the coast line of Lake Superior. She explained how "when I am on the land and engaging with the elements around me, that is when like, I feel the most at home. I can walk around and see everything I need to sustain myself, because everything I need is in the woods" (RB, Interview, September 8 2018). She explained how her connection to the land is also in partnership to her relationship with ancestral knowledge, whereby she alluded to how "…when I am in my home territory, I feel such a strong pull towards my history and

identity. This is the place my ancestors lived on, created and maintained our vibrant culture" (RB, Interview, September 2018).

Cultural immersion into Indigenous practices is an essential part to one youth participant's way of life (BW, Interview, November 22 2018). She explained how smudging with the sacred medicines, drumming circles, sweats, the use of tobacco, and her constant engagement with the spirit world grounded her in modernity (BW, Interview, November 22 2018). She mentioned how everything has its own spirit and through that you have to understand the relation to the land and Creator (BW, Interview, November 22 2018). She explained how land-based practices are another essential part to her life, such as harvesting wild meat and harvesting plants and berries (BW, Interview, November 22 2018).

Similarly, another youth spoke to how the grounding process for her is a combination of health, traditional teachings, and awareness of our history as Anishinabee people (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). She explained how understanding and recognizing history is critical in understanding how Indigenous people interact with everyday society (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). She also explained how history is directly related to how we as nations understand the teachings of the specific nations and nations' communities (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). Teachings are the history of how Anishinabeg people have come to be where they are at this very moment, as she explained:

> The land is protected. Like as Anishinabee, our teachings are different than that of the nearby communities. It comes down to the same thing, we are all keepers of the land. We all have to protect the land; we are all the same. We all from the spirit world. these things we all share. We are one. We are a community. We are

here to protect each other, whether or not we come from different nations" (CG, Interview, December 2 2018).

The connection Anishinabeg peoples hold to the land, as described above, is sacred to its very essence. As such, the history of these teachings is a grounding cultural phenomenon that is absolutely pivotal in its very foundational components that make up Indigeneity. She went on to explain, "if you suffer from a lack of identity, you are not healthy. You need to acknowledge that maybe a part of yourself needs to be healed. You [cannot] be whole when a piece is missing, and if we are suffering from trauma, addictions, violence, mental health issues, [then] we are not whole and we are suffering" (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). This youth from described how her cultural identity is directly in partnership with her connection to her communal history and ancestral knowledge, therefore speaking to the teachings, like those of the land and her ability to balance her life with that traditional approach to Indigeneity (CG, Interview, December 2 2018).

One youth described her connection to Indigenous culture as a grounding mechanism to achieving and maintaining her own sobriety (CM, Interview, November 7 2018). She explained how being on the land and accessing the water has allowed to her to heal in a traditional sense, and therefore achieve a state of clarity and sobriety away from drugs and alcohol (CM, Interview, November 7 2018). The land is an important factor to consider when looking at how identity is interweaved with aspects of land-based traditional activities and the essence of spirituality and connections to the ancestral knowledge and practices of Anishinabeg peoples. As one youth highlighted, "I think that when you're proud of your cultural identity and your history, people's history, I think you feel more rooted in yourself. I feel like you can go further if you're more rooted in your

past and who you are" (CW, Interview, September 6 2018). The pattern between sobriety

and cultural immersion was discussed by another youth, and she expressed how "knowing

my culture is another big thing that grounds me to never wanting to pick up a drink or

drugs again – nothing… it gives me a sense of belonging, and it gives me that identity. I

don't feel lost…" (BW, Interview, November 22 2018). This statement illustrates how

cultural identity is a key factor in creating and preserving that communal connection and

sense of belonging amongst other Indigenous peoples.

  An aspect of grounding identities within culture also spoke to the direct ties with

traditional knowledge and sacred teachings taught within the communities. Many

participants spoke to how they were not concerned over losing their cultural identity, due

in part to their strength comes from their traditional lifestyle and practicing of traditional

approaches, such as ceremony and protocol. One youth explained that she was not worried

about losing her cultural identity, because she was raised by the 7 grandfather teachings,

and lived everyday with respect to those teachings of honesty, bravery, respect, love,

humility, courage and wisdom (AB II, Interview, September 9 2018). Another youth

described it in terms of accessing and employing traditional sacred medicines, and

understanding the protocols on how to use them (KN, Interview, October 5 2018). She

understands the connection between her own identity and how it is grounded through the

teachings and use of medicines, specifically with regards to the scarcity of life, the

scarcity of the water and to protect the land at all costs (KN, Interview, October 5 2018).

To further expand on that, one youth described her identity in direct relationship to how

she lives every day and how she represents herself. She stated that, "living by the

teachings and living in a balanced way [is important]. you need to recognize... [that] you need to live in a way that all four directions are balanced and working together. Your mental health needs to be in line with your physical, emotional and spiritual selves" (RB, Interview, September 8 2018).

Culturally grounded activities can also be understood in the form of language, as language is a life source to many of the nations' across these lands. Language is a platform that allows people to communicate with their past, their histories and their ancestral connections with the knowledge keepers of their communities. Language, as a youth explained, is "…what gives us our cultural identity, [it is] language" (CM, Interview, November 7 2018). Language is a gateway to the vibrant history that is Anishinabeg peoples of this area, the different nations all had their own variations to the language, which made it distinct and individualized. However, the reality is not that identity is perpetuated forward by the fluent speakers. Instead, the language is being lost gradually with every generational death. Language is a key factor of identity, but as the elders pass onto the spirit world, they take their knowledge and language with them. Another participant explained how she is concerned over the loss of language, she highlighted how "no one's hardly speaking the language anymore. The language is completely lost. That's the number one thing. Like none of my brothers or sisters speak it. My cousins don't speak it" (CM, Interview, November 7 2018). Language is a big part of how cultural identity is crafted and sustained, and with the loss of language the grounding effects of culture are weakened.

The younger generations are at an impasse, specifically when it comes to accessing traditional knowledges and reclaiming identities. A youth expressed that, "I feel like a lot of young people are either [not] aware or [not] able to reclaim [their] cultural identities, because perhaps they don't realize it's lost. I am concerned… [language is] almost a lifeline to your own personal cultural identity, in a way" (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). As she alluded to, youth may not be aware that the missing language is a direct contributor to their loss of identities and loss of connection to their history and culture (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). You can see this loss of self and the identity-crisis' running rampant amongst the youth populations, who are struggling with addictions, trauma, violence and crime across the nations, as suggested by numerous participants thus far.

The loss of language corresponds with the declining elderly population of Indigenous peoples. This generation of Indigenous peoples are those who have attended governmental institutional programs, in order to modernize and civilize the nations' people. These mechanisms of oppression and assimilation have disrupted the cycle of traditional teachings, medicines, language and cultural practices. Many of those generations suffered directly at the hands of the colonialist superpowers, however the ripple effort of intergenerational trauma has superseded and exponentially devastated the practice of sharing Indigenous knowledge transgenerationally (Gone 2013:692; Collins 2015:9).

Cultural identities are formed through the active participation in traditional practices, such as the teachings, ceremony, arts, history and language. Indigeneity is

interwoven with the idea that safe space ought to reflect both a safe physical environment, but also be reflective of a culturally safe environment that is rooted within Indigenous culture. The youth participants highlighted how involvement in cultural practices are essential to their identities as Indigenous women. However, the youth believed that their interpretation of safety with regards to the location and accessibility of these programs, events or activities play a vital role in how often they are able to participate.

<div align="center">Safe Spaces and Reliable Transportation</div>

Safe space, as discussed by the participants of this study, is directly tied to one's accessibility to reliable transportation in and around the city of Thunder Bay. Safety has been understood as a physical level of personal safety and the ability of to having access to a safe, secure and reliable methods of transportation within the city. Public forms of transportation can be understood as the bus system, taxis, or ride-sharing programs. Private forms of transportation can be understood as having access to personal vehicles. Safe space, as discussed previously, is an essential component when discussing Indigenous identity construction and maintenance. This element of transportation is interconnected to identity through the use of culturally safe and reliable forms of transportation available within urban cities, like that of Thunder Bay.

One youth explained how if Indigenous women had options for safer transportation, it would ensure that these young women could make it to their respective destinations, unharmed and in-tact (CC, Interview, December 2 2018). She explained how it cannot be implemented through the local taxi services, as many have encountered racism and issues with this particular form of transportation (CC, Interview, December 2 2018).

Another youth explained how her access to a personal vehicle has been one of the main safeguards to her personal safety here in Thunder Bay. She highlighted how having a car "…is a huge part of what has kept me safe in this city", and she went on to compare the drastic difference living in smaller towns, where she could easily walk anywhere to reach her destination (CC, Interview, December 2 2018). This youth made mention to how "you really have to modify your behaviour living in a city like Thunder Bay. I do love Thunder Bay, but you have to be very cautious" (CC, Interview, December 2 2018).

Another youth explained how walking around in Thunder Bay without vehicle access is a huge barrier to achieving safe spaces. She personally does not feel safe using public transportation, and she recommended that it ought to be better monitored for the safety of its passengers (TC, Interview, September 6 2018). Having access to her personal car allows her to get from point A to point B easily, and not encounter situations that are a cause for concern or problematic to her safety as a young Indigenous woman in Thunder Bay (TC, Interview, September 6 2018). Additionally, she made mention that the accessibility of public transportation (e.g. buses) is not reliable due to its infrequent schedules and its high cost to travel across town (TC, Interview, September 6 2018).

Another point worth considering when looking at public and private transportation in Thunder Bay is how large and spread out the city is. The vastness of how the city is geographically laid out creates issues of how often buses come by, the price of fares, and the time associated with traveling from the Current River area to Westfort, or perhaps to Fort William First Nation. The problem of utilizing private vehicles also faces issues when it comes to the cost of gasoline and diesel. Many youth, as they explained in their

interviews, cannot afford the cost of living in Thunder Bay, and must make decisions to stock their fridge or fill their car for the week (AB II, Interview, September 8 2018).

Transportation was also discussed in relation to how easily one can access cultural outings, such as powwows out on Mount McKay in the summer time (LP, Interview, November 7 2018; and SM, Interview, November 11 2018). One youth in particular explained how having reliable vehicle access has allowed her to be more involved in cultural activities, and as such promoted a healthier lifestyle from her previous boredom driven lifestyle of addictions and alcoholism (CM, Interview, November 7 2018).

Culturally Safe Spaces Promote Healthy Lifestyle Choices for Indigenous Peoples

The final theme examined how individuals conceptualize safe space in Thunder Bay, with specific reference to how their own constructions of Indigeneity are influenced by substance abuse, which inhibits their ability to maintain positive identities. The long-standing history of alcoholism and drug use is not a new phenomenon among many Indigenous families and communities. For the most part, these dependencies can also be understood as coping mechanisms, which speaks directly to the true lived experiences of intergenerational trauma, that stems from a colonial history of assimilation and oppressive mechanisms of removing Indigeneity from the individual. These social mechanisms can be understood as the governmental influences of residential schools, the 60's scoop, the Indian Act, the failure to live up to treaty obligations, and the oppressive measures of classification and categorization of status and non-status Indians.

Many participants discussed how the use of drugs and the consumption of alcohol inhibited them from being culturally alive and it created an unbalanced self. If one person suffers from addictions, they are unwell, and if they are unwell they are not fully present

in an emotional, physical, spiritual and mental way, due to the ailment of addiction (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). In order to heal one must be culturally involved in the Indigenous world-view which promotes health in all four quadrants (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). Therefore, constructions of Indigeneity are very much dependent upon the cultural elements of self and the ability to live a healthy lifestyle.

One youth explained how safety, drug use and boredom are interrelated when it comes to discussing the reality that many youth experience in Thunder Bay. She stated that "...it's really boring here so it's really easy to go out on a Friday night and go drinking and then maybe lead to doing a few lines of drugs..." (KN, Interview, October 5 2018). She explained the dangers youth face if they are not frequent users (KN, Interview, October 5 2018). The youth population, as explained by the participant here, face higher risks associated with overdosing on recreational drug use, especially with the on-going fentanyl crisis (KN, Interview, October 5 2018). She explained how youth who are recreational drug users are also at a higher risk of progressing to harder drugs like that of heroin, and becoming fully addicted (KN, Interview, October 5 2018). Recreational drug use among the youth population in Thunder Bay has been discussed as an ongoing and increasing issue that requires immediate action.

Alcoholism is another factor pertinent to levels of safety experienced by young Indigenous women in Thunder Bay. One youth participant believes that the declining state of Indigenous-based safety in Thunder Bay is absolutely associated with substance abuse and alcoholism. She explained that people who suffer at the hands of addictions are further limiting their own access to safety, and the use of substances limit their ability to

make conscious and appropriate decisions (HS, Interview, December 28 2018). She explained how "…there is a lot of stigma around Indigenous people in general, in Thunder Bay. This causes people to be more ignorant and spiteful towards Indigenous people, especially women, because of their predisposition as a vulnerable minority. The easy access to drugs and alcohol makes for an unsafe environment as well" (HS, Interview, December 28 2018).

Young Indigenous women are often targeted by individuals with ill-intentions. As one youth explained, young Indigenous women are not safe, because of the influence that Toronto and Ottawa has over Thunder Bay's underground black market (KN, Interview, October 5 2018). This youth participant explained how "women are targeted… for their homes, [for the purpose of creating] flophouses, like [these] men will come and take over your home… and they lure you into thinking they like you or something… it's just a dangerous cycle" (KN, Interview, October 5 2018).

The increasing gang-related activity in Thunder Bay was another factor discussed by some of the participants, whereas one youth stated, "…I know a lot of the gang members are getting women hooked on drugs and getting them…[to] sell their body and make money…or tricking them [into doing] drugs, [which creates an addiction to the substance] and [makes them feel like they] don't [have a choice] (BW, Interview, November 22 2018). The relationship between addictions, gang violence, and loss of autonomy is clearly discussed in relation to the lack of safe space for many Indigenous women in Thunder Bay. All of these aspects are interrelated when looking at notions of substance abuse, self-worth, a sense of belonging, and the lack of cultural identity, which

is hindered through the use of substances. As one youth emphasized, her ability to regain a cultural identity was dependent upon her drive to achieve and maintain sobriety. She stated how sobriety "…gives me a sense of belonging, and it gives me that identity… I don't feel lost…when I am participating in [cultural activities] (BW, Interview, November 22 2018).

The Hopes, Dreams and Wishes of a Good Life of Thunder Bay's Young Indigenous Women Participants

The hopes, dreams and wishes of a good life varied from participant to participant. It was dependent on individual factors, such as where one is at in their life course, that affects how they interpret what constitutes living well as Anishinaabe peoples. Living well can be interpreted as living within the culture, traditions and values that Anishinabee people honour. The hopes, dreams and wishes of a good life are important to consider when reflecting on how safe space is essential in creating Indigenous identities, whereas these hopes, dreams and wishes come from a place where it is safe to express one's true self. Indigeneity is rooted within culture, and when looking at Mino-Bimaadiziwin, it takes into consideration the intersections between past, present and future (Debassige 2010). The good life, as alluded to by the participants, was discussed in relationship to their hopes, dreams and wishes. The responses varied due to the subjective nature of individuality, however many did discuss how health, education, employment and sobriety were all components used in creating their versions of Mino-Bimaadiziwin. Safe spaces are necessary components of creating Mino-Bimaadiziwin; these safe spaces are established so that women can regain their roles within families and communities as leaders (ONWA 2017), therefore showcasing how the development of Indigeneity is

critical when looking at the interactions between safe space, identity and Mino-Bimaadiziwin.

Many participants explained how their hopes, dreams and wishes of a good life included living within the traditional culture. They explained how culture includes the traditional ceremony and protocol, smudging and healing traditions, the language, dance and song, or the connection they hold to the land. One youth explained how she would like to pass on the aspect of language to the next generation, because it is language that connects us to our history, elders and community. Language is a major component to cultural identity and cultural vibrancy. Language as mentioned previously, is in a direct relationship with one's identity, however it is more intricately connected in terms of an expression of cultural-self (Brown, McPherson, Peterson, Newman, & Cranmer 2012:52). The missing generation that has suffered at the hands of intergenerational trauma have experienced, as discussed earlier, a "profound loss of identity and sense of belonging, of displacement and dispossession, [which] is echoed [within many communities]. Elders [have indicated] that being unable to speak the language has undermined, if not extinguished, the primary mode through which culture is kept alive and history is passed on" (Brown, McPherson, Peterson, Newman, & Cranmer 2012:52). Many of the youth that have made mention of how cultural identity and language are of utmost importance to them are the same youth who are engaged in bringing back the lost generation's language.

Other participants discussed how their hopes, dreams and wishes of a good life were more focused on their life circumstances, whereby they wanted financial security and permanent housing. The reality is that Indigenous people are predisposition to face

higher rates of poverty, addictions and hardships throughout their lives, and this was echoed in many responses from the youth who participated in the study. As discussed previously, Indigenous women are at a higher rate of experiencing a multitude of interconnected socio-political difficulties, such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness, racialized discrimination, health issues, mental health, addiction and substance related issues and familial disengagement and dysfunction (Collins 2015:8). Many of the youth discussed how they hoped to go back and finish some form of high school or post-secondary education. The discussions included how education is necessary in order to achieve job security and financial security. All of the participants who are currently living in a temporary shelter are also unemployed and have only a grade school, or high school education. The barriers discussed highlight how it is harder for individuals facing homelessness, poverty and socio-environmental stressors to focus on things such as education, however they all alluded to how education is important to achieve stability in their lives.

In conclusion, the participants spoke in great detail about Indigeneity in relation to safe spaces in Thunder Bay. Therefore, they helped to answer the research question of: how do notions of Indigeneity or cultural identity impact visions of what is necessary to create a safe space in an urban context? Furthermore, we learned about how young Indigenous women conceptualize notions of safe space in Thunder Bay, in terms of achieving their hopes, dreams and wishes of a good life.

The data suggested that young Indigenous women understand safe spaces both subjectively and objectively, whereby safe space is individually perceived but it is also

collective and community driven. The themes were all interconnected and overlapping, especially in terms of identity formation and interpretations of safe space in relation to their geographical location. The core question responses and six main themes discussed through the chapter are all overlapping in terms of safe spaces and cultural identity, and how that relates to living the good life as Indigenous peoples.

Ultimately, Thunder Bay has been classified as a city that is not safe for young Indigenous women. This response was due in part to the high rates of racism, discrimination, violence and social isolation experienced by the participants. They discussed how Indigenous women are targeted based on the fact they are undervalued within society, compared to their Euro-settler counterparts. The issues of targeting based on vulnerability and minority status was predominantly discussed in relation to human-trafficking in Thunder Bay. Young Indigenous women are manipulated into sex-work. The barriers that limit young Indigenous women from achieving safe spaces of their own are further disadvantaged, and limited through the inability to access culturally appropriate programs and services in Thunder Bay. Recommendations for creating a safer Thunder Bay included many discussions of advocacy. Using one's voice to speak on behalf of those who have been oppressed and silenced through colonial means of control, in order to bring light to the problematic reality many Indigenous youth face in Thunder Bay.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Indigenous populations are growing at unprecedented rates within larger city centers, like that of Thunder Bay. As such there is a need to research the social disadvantages experienced by many Indigenous residents. Urban Indigenous women are at a social disadvantage, particularly in terms of accessing culturally appropriate safe spaces (Ontario Native Women's Association n.d.; Latimer, Sylliboy, MacLeod, Rudderham, Francis, Hutt-MacLeod, Harman, & Finley 2018:1). In terms of cultural safety, many Indigenous peoples feel as though their identities as Indigenous peoples and their cultures are viewed as 'out of place' in the urban setting (Peters & Lafond 2013:89).

The research question for the purpose of this master thesis inquired about how notions of Indigeneity or cultural identity impact visions of what is necessary to create a safe space in an urban context? Furthermore, it looked at how young Indigenous women conceptualize notions of safe space in Thunder Bay, in terms of achieving their hopes, dreams and wishes of a good life.

In the end, 31 young Indigenous women discussed their understanding of safety in Thunder Bay. The participants were asked a series of questions pertaining to general demographic information, identity construction, safe space and leadership related questions. They also discussed how safe spaces is interconnected with their life course and goal setting and attainment processes.

The methodological considerations of this research project incorporated the amalgamation of both Indigenous-research frameworks and dominant Eurocentric research frameworks. Semi-structured interviews were used with a narrative-based approach, also referred to as story work, in order to discuss the true lived experiences of

Thunder Bay's young Indigenous women's population. Sharing circles were used as an Indigenous-based research tactic, as they allowed for the participants to speak through spirit about the reality of safe space in Thunder Bay.

The Two-Eyed Seeing framework has been applied within this research project. This Indigenous-centered approach focused on how young Indigenous women in Thunder Bay conceptualize safe space; this approach is done through the integration of an Indigenous and the Euro-Western lens. These approaches can be seen within this project, because the two Indigenous graduate researchers used Indigenous research methods and frameworks, from within the very westernized institution that is higher education. Two-Eyed Seeing highlights the use of Indigenous strengths and ways of knowing from one eye, and from the other eye, it uses the strengths and ways of knowing of western epistemologies (Goulding, Steels, McGarty 2016:787).

The fundamental elements of the Two-Eyed Seeing approach recognizes Indigenous knowledges as distinctive stand-alone epistemologies, compared to the pre-existing paradigm of the Western knowledges (Marsh, Cote-Meek, Toulouse, Najavits and Young 2015:4). This concept can be directly linked to how the two research approaches ought not be placed in silos of seclusion, but rather the different ways of knowing could be used together, in order to build on the strengths and work to alleviate the weaknesses of each in this particular study.

As the youth conferred, Thunder Bay is not seen as a safe space for young Indigenous women, due in part to the racism, discrimination, violence and social isolation experienced by the participants. The issues of targeting already vulnerable women for

human trafficking in Thunder Bay was a prominent discussion point made by many youths. Young Indigenous women are manipulated into sex-work, which is a problematic issue in Thunder Bay. The barriers experienced by many young Indigenous women is challenging, especially in the sense that these social disadvantages are further limiting access to programming and culturally appropriate assistance-based programming in Thunder Bay. These societal forms of oppression and mechanisms of disadvantage ultimately disadvantage the Indigenous peoples at unparalleled rates, as discussed by the participants.

Recommendations for creating a safer Thunder Bay included many discussions of advocacy. Many discussed using one's voice to speak on behalf of those who have been oppressed and silenced through colonial means of control. As one youth emphasized, it is important to use one's voice to speak for others, and to be loud, strong and unapologetic when facing the adversity of racially perpetuated discrimination and forms of socialized oppression (CG, Interview, September 6 2018). Recommendations for creating a safer city is worth discussing in greater detail; social change springs from active discussions of social issues, and through active discussion comes active response to these problematic areas of social disadvantage and hardship. If safe spaces are inhibited from forming in Thunder Bay, it hinders one's ability to be immersed in culturally safe environments, which limits the development of cultural identities. In other words, identity constructions, as discussed in great detail throughout this paper, are created through and maintained within these safe spaces.

The findings of this research project have been broken down into 6 themes that speak to Indigeneity and safe spaces experienced by the young women of Thunder Bay. One of the first prominent themes is that of physical safe spaces. A physical safe space can be understood in relation to how an individual recognizes safe spaces in terms of a building, place or space. Space spaces is a physical embodiment of a place one can access, touch, see and use. It is something that is objectively understood as a place of safety, such as women's shelters, shelter house, Ontario Native Women's Association programming or safe houses around the city. Safe space, as described by the participants, includes multiple subjective definitions of what safety means to them. The individualized responses to how they understand safe space is reflective of the subjectivity that is Indigeneity, and how the integration between a sense of Indigeneity and safe space requires a balance between the two elements.

Many of the youths discussed how safe space is limited through consumerism, whereas safe spaces ought to reflect the financial reality of many youths in Thunder Bay. By placing financial price tags on places to go and spend time, in a safe capacity, often requires a monetary contribution; malls, movie theaters, concerts, restaurants, or social gatherings require a financial contribution in order to participate.

The second theme looked at how safe space can be understood in a subjective and individualized manner. Safe space is personalized to each and every participant, and it is specifically influenced by their conceptualizations of safety in relation to themselves, in a personal and subjective nature. In other words, if a young Indigenous youth holds their Indigeneity in the highest regards, accepts themselves and their self-worth and is able to

see themselves in a positive and as well represented self, they are then promoting a safe space within themselves.

It is the interconnection between internal safe space and physical safe space that constitutes a well-balanced self, which must be thought of beyond the confines of physical and objective understandings of safe spaces. You ultimately cannot have a safe physical space without the corresponding inner-personal safe space, and through the bonding of these two safe spaces, one can start to create a safe community network of people in that specific area. Safe spaces can be understood as how individuals internalize their own personal identities and sense of belonging to a specific group, such as the concept Indigeneity among the research participants. The sense of belonging and personal acceptance of oneself is imperative to consider, mainly because it addresses how one manages their own self-esteem and social pressures.

The third theme discussed the notion of white-washing Indigenous identities through the colonial oppressive regime, where it speaks to how those youths who are seemingly 'white-passing' struggle with their own Indigeneity. The notion of white-passing can be comprehended as an individual who despite their fair skinned appearance, claims some form of Indigenous ancestry, whether it be First Nations, Metis, or Inuit. The construction of personal identities is situated around how these white-passing Indigenous youth situate themselves within both worlds; the world of the minority and that of the majority. Safe spaces in Thunder Bay for young Indigenous women have a strong association to the color of one's skin, whereby implying that acceptance in Thunder Bay is hinged upon the degree of whiteness they portray to society. Visibly identifiable

Indigenous youth experience higher levels of social reprimand for their cultural and racial characteristics, compared to that of white-passing Indigenous youth who often experience racism and violence through intergenerational transference and through experiences of others.

Governmental influence on classification criteria of what is deemed 'Indian enough' to be 'Indian' further divides white-passing youth from others. These systems of governmental and societal interference interact with how individuals understand their own Indigeneity. This is especially the case in relation to the outside world, which is influenced constantly by criteria of eligibility. These different considerations of what constitutes status versus non-status or white-passing versus visibly identifiable impose expectations surrounding their sense of identity.

The fourth theme discussed the relationship between Indigeneity and cultural engagement, which is paramount when discussing the notion of safe spaces in Thunder Bay. As discussed, safe spaces are contingent upon one's cultural identity and through women's roles as leaders within families and communities (OWNA 2017), the construction and development of Indigeneity is based within culture. Culture is the main focal point of this section, and how cultural immersion creates stronger ties to one's sense of Indigeneity.

Cultural identities are formed through participation in traditional activities, such as the teachings, ceremony, arts, history and language. Indigeneity is interwoven with the idea that safe space ought to reflect both a safe physical environment, but also be reflective of culturally safe environment that is rooted within Indigenous culture. The

youth participants emphasized that their involvement in cultural practices is essential to their identities as Indigenous women. Although, the youth alleged that their interpretation of safe spaces is associated with the location and accessibility of these cultural programs, events or activities, which play a vital role in how often they are able to participate.

The fifth theme discussed how safe spaces for the youth participants was, for the most part, dependent upon reliable forms of transportation within the city of Thunder Bay. Safety was defined in this context as a physical level of personal safety, which is associated with having access too safe, secure and reliable methods of transportation. Public transportation includes the city buses, taxis' or ride-sharing programs. On the contrary, private transportation can be understood as one's access to personal vehicles.

Safe spaces, as discussed previously, is an essential component when discussing Indigenous identity construction and maintenance. Transportation is connected to identity through the use of culturally safe and reliable forms of transportation available within urban cities, like that of Thunder Bay. Transportation to access cultural outings, such as powwows, programs, events or ceremonies is crucial to consider when discussing Indigeneity and safe spaces in Thunder Bay. Having reliable vehicle access has allowed the youth to be more involved in their culture. This is particularly important when discussing youth who struggle with substance abuse, and cultural immersion is their method of coping with the addiction. Transportation provides a safe alternative to walking alone at night, it provides a method of coping with addictions through being able to attend cultural events around the city. Transportation allows for the youth to further establish

safe spaces within themselves, and access physical safe spaces which in turn further develop their own sense of Indigeneity.

The sixth and final theme discussed the relationship between how cultural safe spaces in Thunder Bay influence healthier lifestyle choices among the Indigenous youth. The data showed how the youth conceptualize safe space in Thunder Bay with reference to their own constructions of Indigeneity; The youth participants explained how the influences of alcoholism and substance abuse limit one's ability to maintain one's identity as Indigenous peoples.

The use of illicit and abuse of licit drug use is not a new phenomenon among many Indigenous families and communities. For the most part, these dependencies can be understood as a form of coping mechanisms. Coping mechanisms, like that of drug use, speak directly to the true lived experiences of intergenerational trauma, which stem from a colonial history of assimilation and oppression, which serve as a tool to remove the Indigeneity from one's identity. Many participants discussed how the use of drugs and the consumption of alcohol inhibited them from being culturally alive and it created an unbalanced self. If someone is suffering from an addiction, they are unwell, and if they are unwell they are not fully awake in an emotional, physical, spiritual and mental way (CG, Interview, December 2 2018). In order for healing to occur, one must be fully surrounded by culture, which is prominent within the Indigenous world. Therefore, arguing how constructions of Indigeneity is very much dependent upon the cultural elements of self and the ability to live a healthy lifestyle within the safe spaces that promote cultural identities to thrive.

As an Indigenous youth researcher, my policy change recommendations, that have been brought forth from this research project, would highlight the dire need for additional funding for Indigenous peoples in Thunder Bay. There is a lack of funding for creating safe spaces around the city that do not require consumerism to participate in the events and activities. The need for funding to create Indigenous centers, which would promote holistic healing and traditional activities throughout the city have been discussed as a limitation by the participants. Funding could also serve beneficial to promote the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous youth who require transportation around Thunder Bay. Transportation in terms of culturally safe approaches to attending programs, events and traditional ceremonies throughout the year. Providing avenues for Indigenous youth to travel safety from destination to destination, such as creating ride-share programs created by Indigenous people to serve Indigenous peoples.

Funding is only a topical solution to addressing the systemic issues experienced in Thunder Bay. A further analysis of how the social structure of education and awareness of Indigenous-based issues and experiences are required to educate the general public of true lived experiences of many Indigenous youth. Future recommendations for research could look at how other age cohorts understand safe spaces in Thunder Bay in relation to how grounded they are within their culture as Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, one could look at the gender differential between young Indigenous men's interpretation of safe spaces and the relationship to cultural identity. The combination of gender analyses of safe space and identity development could be used as a basis to cross-match similar structural and social system weaknesses affecting the Indigenous youth.

Safe spaces are absolutely required in order for Indigenous youth to establish their own cultural identity within society. There are numerous factors that attempt to limit and inhibit the development of and continuance of Indigeneity in contemporary society. However, it is through the resiliency portrayed by the youth that their Indigeneity is resurging throughout the populations. The youth discussed how space spaces are integral elements when discussing how one interacts within society, with specific reference to their sense of belonging and social acceptance. Safe spaces are indispensable factors required in order to achieving Mino-Bimaadiziwin. These safe spaces allow for the Indigenous youth to regain their roles within families and communities as leaders (ONWA 2017), therefore showcasing how the development of Indigeneity is critical when looking at the interactions between safe space, identity and Mino-Bimaadiziwin.

APPENDICES

Interview Consent form

INTERVIEW CONSENT INFORMATION LETTER

Creating a safe space for Indigenous youth in urban areas: The Case of Young Women in Thunder Bay

Boozhoo! Welcome! Creating a Safe Space is a research project, funded the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and undertaken by Dr. Chris Southcott of Lakehead University and Dr. Patricia McGuire of Carleton University in partnership with the Ontario Native Women's Association. The project will identify what young Indigenous women in Thunder Bay believe will make their community a safe space for them. As a young Indigenous woman living in Thunder Bay we ask you to help us better understand how to make this city a safe space for you.

Benefits: By participating you will help create a better understanding of how to ensure Thunder Bay is a good place for young Indigenous women to live safe and enjoyable lives.

Risks: There are no expected risks or harms associated with the interviews, but it is possible that sensitive topics may rise. If required, you will be provided with the name of an elder and/or other person who can assist you.

Consent: You can change your mind about participating. Your consent is not permanent. You can withdraw from the research at any time and any stories/information associated will be destroyed upon request. Audio recording of the interview will require your signed consent.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is completely voluntary. You can decide to not answer any question, participate in any part of the study, or leave or withdraw at any time.

What is required?: Following the signing of the consent form you will be asked a series of questions relating to safe space in Thunder Bay. The interview will usually take a half hour to an hour. If you agree, you may also be contacted one other time by phone or by e-mail for a few follow-up questions.

Confidentiality: Your contribution will be anonymous and remains confidential. In publications either no name or pseudonyms will be used. All members of the research team are obliged to keep confidentiality and are not allowed to release the identity of an interview partner. Only the internal research team has access to your interview. The publication will be in a form that you will not be recognized by any other person. However, you can indicate that you agree on publishing your information with your name on the attached consent form. The recordings of your participation will be securely stored at Lakehead University for five years and then destroyed.

Results: We will use this research to write at least one research report and make several presentations. We would be happy to send you a copy of the research report and invite you to the presentations if you so indicate on the consent form. The research will also be used to write two Master's thesis and one or two published articles.

Contact Information

Principal Investigator:	Co-investigator:	Partner:

Chris Southcott, Professor, Sociology, Lakehead University 807-343-8349 csouthco@lakeheadu.ca	Patricia McGuire, Professor, Social Work, Carleton University patricia.mcguire@carleton.ca	Tamara Bernard, Ontario Native Women's Association tbernard@onwa.ca
Researcher: Josie Zussino, Master's student, Sociology, Lakehead University, jazussin@lakeheadu.ca		**Researcher:** Alycia Benson, Master's student, Sociology, Lakehead University, agbenson@lakeheadu.ca

This study has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or research@lakeheadu.ca.

Miigwetch! *Thank you, for taking the time to participate in the research.*

CONSENT FORM

I have read and understood the information letter for the study and agree to participate. I understand the potential risks and/or benefits of the study, and what those are. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study any time and choose not to answer questions. I understand the data will be securely stored on digital devices at Lakehead University for a period of 5 years. I understand that my participation will remain anonymous unless I indicate otherwise. In any case where I provide authorization to use my name and quotes, I understand that I will have the opportunity to review the information, in its presented context before it is finalized and published. The research results will be published in a research report which I will receive in electronic form by the end of the project if I so choose. They will also be presented at community workshops and used for published academic papers.

Audio Recording of Interview: I agree that information from this interview can be collected and recorded on a digital audio recorder: ☐ **YES**   ☐ **NO**

Do you consent to us calling you after today or e-mailing you to ask if you have any follow up questions, comments or concerns?   ☐ **YES**   ☐ **NO**

Regarding my privacy and confidentiality, I choose one of the following options:

☐ I do not agree to direct quotes of mine being used in reports or publications, and I prefer to stay anonymous and do not want my name to be listed or associated with any information that I provide

☐ I agree to have direct quotes of mine used in reports or publications, but I prefer to stay anonymous and do not want my name to be listed or associated with any of the quotes or information that I provide

☐ I agree to have direct quotes of mine used in reports or publications, and I agree to have my quotes associated with or attributed to my name

☐ I would like to have a copy of the research sent to the e-mail address listed below.

Signature of Participant   **Date Signed (mm/dd/yyyy)**

Print Name   **Phone Number**

E-mail address:

Interview Guide

Creating a Safe Space Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview.

Before we start the group, I want to review the Consent Form with you and find out if you have any questions.

We are asking you to share your stories and views about issues affecting young Indigenous women in Thunder Bay. We want to find out what you feel will make Thunder Bay a better place for you to live in. We want to find out what are the main obstacles to you having a safe space in the city and what needs to be done to create a safe space for you in the city.

*<u>Your opinions are very important</u>. There are <u>**no right or wrong answers**</u> to our questions. We welcome all points of view.*

*I will be taking notes and recording this session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. It is sometimes difficult to capture in writing everything that people are saying so the recording ensures that we won't miss any of your comments. I assure you that the information that you share will be held in the strictest of confidence. We will only be using first names in our conversation and <u>**no names will be used in our report to protect your confidentiality**</u>. I will NOT share your personal information in a way that any person can be identified. I just want to hear your ideas on the topics. The findings and conclusions will be made public through written reports, published articles and presentations.*

Some of the stories we will be discussing may deal with emotional experiences. If you feel a need for support we have an elder, who you can contact and who can help you. We also have the names of other professionals who can help you on these cards.

Let's review a description of the interview

- *The interview will last about 45 minutes to 1 hour depending on how much you have to say.*

- *Some of what we discuss may bring up strong emotions or feelings. If you need to take a break, you may do so at any point. Again, you don't have to answer any question you're not comfortable answering.*

Any questions before we start? Let's get started with a few questions about yourself.

1. How old are you?

2. Do you identify as _____ First Nation _____ Metis _____ Inuit _____ or other? *(Adapted for Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2017)*

3. Are you a Status Indian, that is, a Registered or Treaty Indian as defined by the Indian Act of Canada? *(Adapted for Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2017)*

4. What is the highest grade of school that you have ever completed? (try to determine if high school diploma and level of post-secondary education if any) *(Adapted for Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2017)*

5. Are you currently _____ renting an apartment or house _____ own your home

    _____ living with friends or family _____ renting a room in a rooming

    house/hostel _____ living in a temporary shelter _____ other (*Adapted from*

    Environics Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study)

6. Do you live alone? _____ yes _____ no

    6a. If yes: What members of your family and other people usually live with

    you? (*Adapted from Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2017*) ___ both parents ___

    mother ___ father ____ spouse _____ common law partner ____ son ____

    daughter _____ other

7. Where is home for you?

    a. How close a connection do you feel to your home community? (A lot,

        some, not a lot)

8. How long have you lived in the city?

9. How much do you like living in your city? Would you say you like it or dislike it?

10. Why do you like or dislike it?

Core Questions:

1) Is Thunder Bay currently a safe space for young Indigenous women? Why?

2) What is preventing Thunder Bay from being a safe space for young Indigenous

    women?

3) What would you recommend be done to help Thunder Bay become a safe

    space for young Indigenous women?

B.   **Follow up Questions: These would be asked once responses to the core questions have been finished. When answers are being suggested, circle the best answer.**

11. Would you say you are very, somewhat, not very, or not at all proud to be Indigenous? Why?

12. Do you totally agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or totally disagree with the following statement: "I am concerned about losing my cultural identity." Why?

13. Do you feel safe (spiritually, mentally, socially and physically) identifying as Indigenous in Thunder Bay? Always, sometimes, never. Why?

14. In your opinion, what aspects of Aboriginal culture are most important to be passed on to your children or grandchildren, or to the next generation?

15. Think about the future and in what ways you hope their children's and grandchildren's lives (or the lives of the next generation) will be different from your own?

16. How close a connection do you feel [to members of your own Indigenous group]?

17. Over the past few years, do you think that non-Indigenous people's impression of Indigenous people has gotten better, or worse or stayed the same in Thunder Bay?

18. Do you feel accepted in Thunder Bay's community?

19. Overall, how much impact do you think people like you can have in making your city a better place to live?

20. What are three things that you most want to achieve in your lifetime?

21. Is it important for young Indigenous women to have good leaders in order to help Thunder Bay become a safe space for you?

22. Who do you consider to be an urban (Indigenous) leader?

23. What quality(ies) should an effective leader (especially one who serves the young Indigenous women in an urban area such as Thunder Bay) have?

24. Do you have aspirations to be a leader? Why or why not?

    a. What barriers or challenges have you faced in your path to attaining a leadership role?

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