Ê-ÂCIMOCIK: STORYING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF INDIGENOUS FACULTY AND STAFF AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

by

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DEDICATION

First, I dedicate this work to my family, thank you for always supporting my educational path despite the physical distance it put between us. To my partner, Craig—your unwavering support kept me going through this journey when I wanted nothing more than to quit. Kisâkihitin. Finally, to the Indigenous professionals and students at MSU—your incredibly hard work inspired me to pursue this line of research in the first place. You make this university a home.

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GLOSSARY or NOMENCLATURE

Âcimowin: A story

AI/AN: American Indian/Alaska Native; the U.S. Census designated category for peoples belonging to a federally-recognized or state-recognized tribe

AIANSSS: American Indian/Alaska Native Student Support Service; the student support office housed under the Department of Native American Studies at Montana State University

AIC: American Indian Council; one of the longest running student-led organizations at Montana State University focusing on community development and cultural connection for Indigenous students

AIBL: American Indigenous Business Leaders; a student organization assisting Indigenous students in business-adjacent fields of study with professional development and entrepreneurial skills

AISES: American Indian Science and Engineering Society; a student organization focusing on research and career development for American Indian students in STEM

Atoskêwin: Work or labor; a job

AY: Academic year

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

CAIP: Council of American Indian Programs; a working group dedicated to Indigenous-serving programs at Montana State University

CFE: Center for Faculty Excellence

CO-OP: Caring for Our Own Program; a student support program for Native nursing students situated within the College of Nursing

DEAL: Developing Excellence in Academic Leadership; a leadership development program offered through Montana State University's Center for Faculty Excellence

DEI: Diversity, equity, and inclusion

Ê-âcimocik: They are visiting; they are telling stories

FEM: Family Education Model; a model for holistically supporting tribal college students presented by HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002)

IEFA: Indian Education for All

IMP: Indigenous Mentoring Program; a training program offered through the Center for Faculty Excellence that highlights culturally relevant strategies for mentoring Indigenous students in STEM

Indigenous: Refers to any group of peoples original to a place, especially tribally-situated peoples.

ISA: Indigenous Student Affairs

IRMs: Indigenous research methodologies

Kiskêyihtamowin: knowledge; epistemology

Kitatamihin: Thank you; you make me feel grateful

Kiyâm: Let it be; it's okay

Nêhiyaw: Cree

Nêhiyawewin: Cree language

Mâmawinikewin: To gather a group of things together

Mêkinawêwin: Giving a gift or present

MSU: Montana State University

Miyo: Good or goodness

Miyo-tôtamowin: Good or benevolent actions

Miyo-wîcêhtowin: Good relations

Niyah: Me or I

PWI: Predominantly White institution

Sâkihitowin: Love

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Storywork: An Indigenous research methodology tied to the oral tradition of storytelling as articulated by Archibald (2008)

Tâpwê: Truth

Tawâw: Welcome; there is room

Wâhkôhtowin: Relatedness

Wîcihitowak: They help each other

ABSTRACT

In the Fall of 2021, Montana State University reported its largest number of American Indian/Alaska Native students. Despite this growing population of students, few professionals employed by this institution are adequately prepared to meet the holistic needs of Indigenous communities who are affiliated with the university. Consequently, a small group of Indigenous professionals are tasked with taking on this work. To address gaps in service to Indigenous communities, this research provides potential strategies for university professionals to consider as part of the strategic planning process. Employing an Indigenous approach to academic research, a group of 10 Indigenous professionals employed by Montana State University were interviewed about their personal experiences working for a predominantly White institution and the ways that their identities play a role in their professional work. The majority of interviewees noted additional responsibilities were expected of them due to their identities as Indigenous people. Based on their responses, this study identifies four key areas that significantly impact the workplace experiences of Indigenous professionals at Montana State University, including relationships with students, community support, knowledge of Indigenous kinship systems, and emotional and cultural labor.

CHAPTER ONE

TAWÂW: A NÊHIYAW INTRODUCTION

Niyah: Standpoint Statement

The passage is open, safe.

tawastêw.

—Naomi McIlwraith, "tawastêw – The Passage is Safe"

Tânsi! Wîhkask waciy iskwêw nisikason. Asinîwacîsihk ohci niyah. Niyah Nêhiyaw, Anishinaabe, êkwa Amskapi Piikani. Hello! My name is Sweetgrass Mountain Woman. I come from Rocky Boy, Montana. I am Cree, Chippewa, and Blackfeet. I introduce myself in the way I was taught in Nêhiyawewin. I offer this greeting as an introduction to my positionality and how it informs my research. Nêhiyaw phrases are used throughout this work to illustrate my connectedness to a Nêhiyaw worldview. I humbly ask for forgiveness from my Nêhiyaw wâhkômâkanak should my spelling and usage of Nêhiyawewin contain mistakes. Kitatamihin.

I come to this research as a Nêhiyaw iskwêw, an enrolled member of the Chippewa-Cree Tribe. I am also of Blackfeet, Métis, Finnish, Swedish, and French lineage. I am a "mixed-blood" person, a daughter, a granddaughter, a sister, a wife, an auntie, an advocate, a friend, a student, and a higher education professional. I was born in the border town of Havre, Montana and raised in Rocky Boy. I acknowledge that I am a displaced Cree, living off-reservation and away from my homelands for many years—but I am a rez girl at heart. I carry all of these experiences with me and honor the ways that my multifaceted background informs how I go about in the world, as well as my relationship to my research.

While it is true that Bozeman has been my place of residence for several years, and certainly serves as a sort of home-base, I cannot truly say that Bozeman is where I am *from*. I make this clear at the forefront in order to emphasize that the work I do within this urban context occurs outside of my ancestral homelands and requires that I acknowledge the place-based knowledges of other tribal nations. That said, I write this from A'aninin, Little Shell Anishinaabe, Apsáalooke, Piikani, Tsétsėhéstȧhese, Seliš, Ktunaxa/Ksanka, Qíispé, Lakota, Dakota, Nakoda, Shoshone, Bannock, Arapaho, Niimiipuu, and many other tribes' hunting grounds and homelands (Montana State University, 2019).

As a student and employee of Montana State University (MSU), my investment in this urban Indigenous community requires that I embrace an intertribal stance when it comes to my involvement in research, student support, and focused efforts to improve Indigenous experiences. However, I realize that I can only produce this work from my personal standpoint as a mixed Nêhiyaw student and professional and cannot speak for the larger Indigenous community of MSU. Although the community of Indigenous professionals at our university may be small in numbers, we encompass many different tribal affiliations, knowledges, traditions, and areas of expertise. In short, our institution's Indigenous community is widely diverse, yet we are often required to set aside tribal specificity as a result of our situatedness in an urban setting and rapidly growing university.

As an Indigenous person who occupies this space, I realize that the higher education system shapes numerous aspects of my life—from my livelihood to my social life. Even though I often feel at odds with the ideologies that pervade the Western higher education system, I remind myself that I am here because I genuinely care about the future of Indigenous communities and

how these communities might benefit from the work that current Indigenous students, faculty, and staff are doing today in Western academic spaces. In all, this work is a love letter to the Indigenous communities who have entrusted our institution with their future leaders, who contribute their expertise to many ongoing research projects at MSU, and who invest their time and care into this institution as scholars, professionals, laborers, volunteers, consultants, counselors, educators, advocates, and more.

Notes on Terminology and Nêhiyawewin

For the purposes of this study, I broadly refer to tribal groups/persons as *Indigenous* to encompass all those affiliations including American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), Canadian First Nations, Native Hawaiian, as well as the original and tribally-situated peoples throughout North America and beyond. Because this research focuses on the university setting, a space that serves people of numerous diverse backgrounds, I felt it was appropriate to describe original peoples as Indigenous in order to be as inclusive as possible to peoples of all tribal backgrounds.

Additionally, rather than call research participants "subjects," I refer to participants in this study as *collaborators*. At times, I use the terms participant or collaborator interchangeably. However, I generally refer to the particular individuals involved in this study as collaborators to acknowledge the contributions that these individuals have graciously offered. This is done out of respect for their knowledge and collaboration and is also meant to emphasize the relationship between myself and all others who joined in this work.

Finally, I use Nêhiyawewin (Cree language) throughout this work to honor my background as a Nêhiyaw person. I am by no means a fluent speaker of Nêhiyawewin, and realize that my usage of Nêhiyawewin reflects at least two different Plains Cree community

dialects since it is drawn from numerous sources. Primarily, this work utilizes the phraseology of the Rocky Boy Cree of the Rocky Boy's reservation of northcentral Montana and the Maskwacîs Cree of the Samson Cree Nation of central Alberta, Canada, among others. In addition to asking relatives and friends about particular Nêhiyaw words and phrases, I also referred to *itwêwina* for spelling and accuracy—an online Plains Cree dictionary made by the Alberta Language Technology Lab in conjunction with the First Nations University of Regina, Saskatchewan and the Maskwacîs Education Schools Commission of Maskwacîs, Alberta (Alberta Language Technology Lab, n.d.). Other helpful resources for my learning of Nêhiyawewin include the Online Cree Dictionary web application sponsored by the Miyo Wahkohtowin Education Authority, and the Mahchiwminahnanahtik: Chippewa and Cree Language Revitalization (MCCLR) project based in Rocky Boy, Montana.

Background and Project Rationale

Working for a predominantly White institution (PWI), Indigenous faculty and staff at MSU are generally called upon to educate non-Indigenous students, faculty, staff, and community members about the traditions and lifeways associated with Indigenous cultures on any given day. Considering our status as Indigenous peoples situated within a Western academic setting, many of us come to expect this as just another part of our duties. It is no question that this aspect of our work is necessary not only to promote cross-cultural engagement and honor the knowledges and cultural traditions of Montana's tribal nations, but also to uphold the mission and values of a land-grant institution. Regardless of how much time, energy, and resources it takes to educate others about Indigenous core values, our institution has a responsibility to ensure that our community of students, faculty, and staff as a whole is provided with the tools

necessary work alongside Indigenous peoples in a state where AI/AN people make up around six percent of the state population (US Census Bureau, 2020). Additionally, with five percent of the student body at MSU identifying as AI/AN as of Academic Year 2021-2022, we might consider our university as dually responsible for supporting a growing number of AI/AN students while also providing our extended communities with ongoing and meaningful training opportunities so that they might become culturally competent and capable of teaching, serving, and supporting AI/AN students (Montana State University, 2022).

Statistics and urgency aside, our Indigenous communities should not need to argue for equitable treatment at a public university. Indeed, MSU's "Choosing Promise" strategic plan identifies that a key goal of our institution is to "broaden access for underrepresented populations and increase academic success for all students through excellence in undergraduate education" (Montana State University, 2019). If this statement is meant to include Indigenous students, and I believe this is the case, then we might consider this goal as a promise to Indigenous communities that their success is a high priority at our institution.

The Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report for Academic Year (AY) 2020-2021 identified two initiatives that were implemented in order to better equip students, faculty, and staff with the skills necessary to mitigate discrimination and improve diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at MSU:

1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Reading Groups
2. The Indian Education for All (IEFA) in Montana for One MUS course

Initiatives such as reading groups can certainly diversify the literature that influences academic scholarship at MSU, but texts alone cannot fully represent the nuanced perspectives of

underrepresented communities in today's ever-shifting society. All the same, diversifying the course materials utilized at our university is one way that we can begin to expand our student body's familiarity with Indigenous cultures. The IEFA course is another commendable effort that our university shares with students, faculty, and staff. The most recent Diversity Report for AY 2021-2022 noted that 683 students, faculty, and staff completed the IEFA course, and 59.5% of faculty and staff have completed the course to date (Montana State University, 2022). The IEFA course is a great opportunity for our university to gain a basic understanding of the cultural values held by Montana's tribes, yet without obligation it is difficult to expect that the students, faculty, and staff who have yet to complete the course will make this training a priority. Undeniably, these educational opportunities are a promising start in preparing non-Indigenous allies to work with communities of diverse backgrounds. However, these options do not account for the specific needs and challenges that our Indigenous community at MSU experiences on a day-to-day basis.

Nonetheless, much work at MSU is happening that assists underrepresented communities who are navigating the higher education system. Highlighting recent initiatives, the Diversity Report for AY 2021-2022 reported that campus workshops focused on diversity awareness continue to draw interest from students, faculty, and staff alike (Montana State University, 2022). This report also features the continued efforts of long-standing programs such as the Caring for Our Own Program (CO-OP), which supports AI/AN students in their academic goals as they pursue nursing degrees at MSU. Programs like CO-OP, including the American Indian/Alaska Native Student Success Service (AIANSSS), the Empower Center supporting minority students in STEM fields, and student groups like the American Indian Council (AIC),

American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES), and American Indigenous Business Leaders (AIBL) have long been recognized as resources for Indigenous support and regularly collaborate to provide culturally-relevant programming and services to Indigenous students at our university. The success of these programs is immeasurable. However, these programs are mostly led by a tight-knit group of Indigenous professionals and students, as well as a small number of committed allies. Overall, there is much room for others to join in and assist in the work of these well-established Indigenous-serving programs.

In addition to the initiatives mentioned in the Diversity Reports, MSU offers a handful of opportunities for training and professional development that provide a basic understanding of Indigenous epistemologies. One such program is the Indigenous Mentoring Program (IMP) offered through the Center for Faculty Excellence (CFE). The IMP establishes best-practices for mentoring AI/AN graduate students in STEM fields while emphasizing cultural humility, Indigenous research methods, and the relationship between Indigenous students and their home communities (Montana State University, n.d.). Opportunities like the IMP are especially important because they utilize Indigenous ways of knowing to train non-Indigenous faculty and model cross-cultural engagement through an Indigenous—not Western—lens. The IMP is an invaluable resource, yet this program alone should not be tasked with training all faculty on Indigenous-centered student support strategies.

Additional professional and community development programs include the Developing Excellence in Academic Leadership (DEAL) program offered through the CFE, the forthcoming Building MSU Families initiative meant to promote relationship building between faculty and/or staff and Indigenous students, and working groups such as Common Threads and the Council of

American Indian Programs (CAIP). These resources allow faculty and staff to begin exploring culturally appropriate strategies applicable to their roles at the university. However, there are few options that both prioritize Indigenous ways of knowing and are informed by the expressed needs of the Indigenous faculty and staff at our institution.

Finally, much of these current efforts fall on the shoulders of the Indigenous professionals at MSU who already carry heavy workloads that include teaching, cultural programming, community outreach and education, student support, consulting, recruiting, and more. In his work "Corrupt state university: The organizational psychology of Native experience in higher education," Onondaga scholar Keith James warns that the bureaucratic culture of higher education can cause departmental silos. If Indigenous-oriented programs alone are expected to serve all Indigenous students, it can cause the rest of the institution to neglect Indigenous issues. Moreover, if it is presumed that Indigenous professionals are already taking care of that work, non-Indigenous faculty and staff may consider themselves exempt from ever having to learn appropriate strategies for working with Indigenous students (James, 2004, p. 57). To avoid exacerbating this issue, what our university needs to fulfill its institutional goals and keep its promises to underrepresented communities are faculty and staff training tools that directly reflect *who* our university serves and *how* their identities inform their experiences.

In their seminal article, "First Nations and higher education: The four R's—Respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility" (1991), Cree scholar Verna J. Kirkness and ally Ray Barnhardt describe that universities must be willing to shift towards "a more culturally accommodating view of how knowledge is constructed and passed on to others" (p. 8). If we are to hold ourselves accountable to this concept, our institution may be able to effectively employ

DEI strategies that are relevant to the Indigenous communities we serve. Without knowing what our Indigenous students, faculty, staff are actually experiencing when they come to MSU, we may never be able to adequately meet their needs and provide equitable access to a quality educational experience that our strategic plan promises.

Significance of this Study and Preliminary Observations

Thankfully, a number of strategies can be employed to mitigate the burden of additional responsibilities for Indigenous faculty and staff at our institution. Firstly, hiring more Indigenous faculty and staff members would dually address items highlighted in both the strategic plan and the Diversity & Inclusion Framework Report, the latter of which states that a major goal of MSU is to "recruit, promote the success of, and foster a sense of security and belonging for a diverse student body, faculty and staff" (Montana State University, 2017). This action will take time, but is seriously needed considering that 92 percent of faculty and 91 percent of staff identified as White according to the Diversity Report for AY 2021-2022 (Montana State University, 2022). This solution will take years to fully manifest, and certainly cannot be addressed within the scope of an individual project; however, hiring more Indigenous professionals might signal a greater sense of belonging for Indigenous students and begin to heal the strained relationship between Indigenous communities and Western academic institutions. I include this suggestion as it is surely a goal that our institution should aspire to reach one day.

Secondly, MSU can further invest in its current Indigenous faculty and staff by providing a platform for them to share their experiences so that our university can become better informed of the particular needs of the Indigenous communities that we serve. Perhaps our institution can begin to work in a way that better supports Indigenous ways of knowing and being if we are

willing to elevate Indigenous voices, especially when it comes to university-wide decisions that impact Indigenous student outcomes. Current efforts to include more Indigenous voices in recruitment, enrollment, and retention task forces are promising, yet do not typically include representation from tribal communities nor Indigenous students themselves. Again, I look to Kirkness and Barnhardt's Four R's as a guide for building reciprocal relationships with Montana's tribal nations. If we are ever to actually meet the needs of Indigenous communities, we must privilege their voices in decision making processes.

Finally, by equipping non-Indigenous faculty and staff with the necessary skills to connect and collaborate with Indigenous communities, we might find our institution getting closer to meeting its diversity and inclusion goals. In fact, the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Action Plan adopted in 2020 states that expanding training opportunities through the CFE is a top priority as far as racial equity and inclusion are concerned (Montana State University, 2020). This is a goal that I believe our institution is capable of, and one that can begin to be addressed with intentional training and professional development opportunities that reflect Indigenous knowledges. If we take an indigenized stance on faculty and staff development, we might be able to accomplish much more than surface-level cultural awareness. In all, our institution's stated goals repeatedly emphasize the need for greater opportunities to improve the status of DEI at MSU.

Objectives and Limitations

Of course, all these actions cannot be addressed within the scope of a master's level research project alone. So, to offer a small step in this process, I investigate the lived experiences of Indigenous faculty and staff while employing Jo-ann Archibald's theory of storywork to

acknowledge the pedagogical function of storytelling within an educational setting (Archibald, 2008). I believe that highlighting the cultural significance of storytelling and oral traditions may better educate non-Indigenous stakeholders on the Indigenous epistemologies that inform the work of Indigenous professionals at our university. Because interviews can be easily translated into opportunities for storytelling, I honor the personal stories of Indigenous faculty and staff by re-presenting them as opportunities for cross-cultural collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities who share MSU as a site for learning and building relationality.

Let us remember that this study is only a preliminary step, and findings represent only a fraction of Indigenous professionals employed at MSU. Because their perspectives are invaluable, collaborator experiences should be considered individually where possible. Overall, this study can only truly reflect a specific period of time, and is ultimately filtered through my own interpretations as a researcher. I also acknowledge that much work will still be needed in order to develop a clear plan for moving forward with indigenized practices at MSU. I offer this work as a sample for the type of research that can be continued in order to realize our university's goals as outlined in the strategic plan, the Diversity & Inclusion Framework Report, and the BIPOC Action Plan.

CHAPTER TWO

MÂMAWINIKEWIN: LITERATURE REVIEW

Opening the Knowledge Bundle: Honoring Foundational Concepts

Go home: *kîwê.*

Head north: *kîwêtinohk itohtê.*

Take a route unknown to you.

—Naomi McIlwraith, "The Road to Writer's Block (A Poem to Myself)"

Nêhiyaw scholar Shawn Wilson's *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods* (2008) describes that Indigenous research is based on relationality and maintaining accountability to our relationships. In order to practice what Wilson calls "relational accountability," it is essential that the research process is community-based and rooted in relationship throughout all phases (Wilson, 2008, p. 99). In this view, research is ceremonial because it replicates a sacred space wherein relationality and knowledge production intersect. Wilson also reminds Indigenous researchers that community-oriented research involving elders or cultural protocols "emphasizes learning by watching and doing" (Wilson, 2008, p. 40). Involving cultural protocols is one way that Indigenous researchers can further experience research as a ceremony. Another Nêhiyaw researcher, Margaret Kovach (2010) further supports the use of cultural protocols by Indigenous researchers, stating that they "are a means to ensure that activities are carried out in a manner that reflects community teachings and are done in a good way" (pp. 40-41).

What Wilson and Kovach describe are known as Indigenous research methodologies (IRMs). In practice, IRMs privilege Indigenous values and serve as the guiding principles for carrying out Indigenous-centered projects and are comprised of both a theoretical framework and a specific set of methods for conducting respectful and responsible research (Kovach, 2021; Walter & Andersen, 2013). IRMs situate Indigenous epistemology within an educational context, especially the higher education arena. Despite this situatedness within the academy, IRMs are utilized to reflect an Indigenous cultural lens specific to the researcher's personal standpoint and as a result reflect the holistic nature of the researcher's social position (Walter & Andersen, 2013). I provide this description of IRMs as a preface to this section because I believe that an understanding of Indigenous epistemologies is essential to moving forward with the action steps that I discuss in this work. I also provide this background on IRMs to signify the opening of what I consider my knowledge bundle within the context of my experiences as an emerging Nêhiyaw scholar and higher education professional.

An essential element of Indigenous epistemology, Stó:lō educator and researcher Jo-ann Archibald (2008) describes that holism is comprised of "the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual (metaphysical values and beliefs and the creator), emotional, and physical (body and behavior/action) realms to form a whole healthy person" (p. 11). In this view, interrelatedness is the condition in which we experience ourselves in relation to the world; it is the sum of all the connections that make us who we are. In the abstract, holism is manifest in the ideologies that inform our relationships to other beings. In the concrete, holism is evident in how we conduct ourselves in the physical world. For the purposes of this work, I use the term "knowledge bundle" to refer to holistic, culturally-informed personal knowledge that

encompasses both the abstract and concrete. In short, our knowledge bundles are our lived experiences.

Though individual Indigenous groups and persons have different ceremonial uses and meanings associated with "bundles" (especially medicine bundles), a knowledge bundle does not necessarily occupy physical space in the way that ceremonial bundles often do (Absolon, 2010). Instead, I understand a knowledge bundle to serve as a kind of philosophical memory that we carry throughout our lives. Many Indigenous scholars, educators, and knowledge keepers describe knowledge bundles similarly. As part of her framework for Indigenous Wholistic Theory, Anishinaabe scholar Kathy Absolon (2010) encourages Indigenous practitioners to embrace their specific knowledge sets by recognizing and reflecting on the teachings that inform who we are. Absolon (2010) explains that "picking up our bundles means to relearn, reclaim, pick up and own the teachings and practices that emanate from wholistic theory and knowledge" (p. 75). By *wholistic* Absolon means the relationality between "self, individual, family, community, nation, society and creation," which also signifies reciprocity between these relationships, as well as our connections to environmental and societal influences (Absolon, 2010, p. 76). Like Archibald, Absolon associates (w)holism with the overall health and wellness of a person. To Absolon, wholism is directly tied to "minobimaadsiwin (a good life)" (Absolon, 2010, p. 75). Therefore, honoring and carrying our knowledge bundles shapes our overall wellness and quality of life. Acknowledging the wholistic nature of myself in relation to all others, I proceed by opening my knowledge bundle and describing the teachings I learned in this research ceremony.

To begin, I acknowledge four key teachings that informed my approach to research. These foundational teachings are Archibald's notion of Indigenous storywork, Verna J. Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt's 4Rs (Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility), and the Nêhiyaw concepts of *miyo-wîcêhtowin* (good relations) and *kiyâm* ("let it be" or "it's alright") articulated by Margaret Kovach and Naomi McIlwraith, respectively (Archibald, 2008; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Kovach, 2021; McIlwraith, 2012). Embracing the relational nature of IRMs, I consider these scholars and their ideas my relatives. I spent many hours sitting with these texts and discussing their teachings with family, friends, and colleagues. At times, I resisted their teachings out of stubbornness and laziness, but ultimately realized that in order to be a good relative to these texts I must listen and receive these teachings with a good heart. Often, this meant closing the book or laptop and coming back when I was ready to receive. I had to continuously remind myself to come to this work with a good heart, and as a result find these foundational concepts comforting despite the many challenges associated with producing this work.

From the start, I noticed that stories were central to the relationships and day-to-day tasks associated with my role as the Outreach Coordinator/Recruitment Specialist with AIANSSS. With every conversation, email, and meeting with my Indigenous colleagues at MSU, I recognized a series of stories emerging about the work we do at this institution—every late night and early morning, every success and challenge, every sacrifice and celebration. This should have been no surprise; after all, everything we experience in this life is story. I wondered how these stories could be elevated and provide a way for Indigenous professionals to thrive at MSU. Considering the relational, hands-on nature of my professional work, I knew that IRMs would

guide me in such a way that kept lived experience at the heart of the process. Alas, story is truly the most honest path for conducting such research.

To understand story as research, I looked no further than Archibald's *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit* (2008). *Indigenous storywork* is a seminal text for understanding the pedagogical function of Indigenous oral traditions, especially storytelling as both a theoretical framework and research methodology for Indigenous scholarship. First, Archibald (2008) describes that storywork reflects the principles of "respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy" (p. 9). She considers storywork a practice that can legitimize storytelling within an educational context (Archibald, 2008, p. 20). Archibald (2008) further describes the power of storytelling to bridge ideological "chasms" between different groups (p. 123). That is, storytelling can provide a way of describing common values shared between cultures. Even when value systems between groups seem to diverge, storytelling is often lauded as a universal experience that can foster relationality across diverse groups and promote mutual respect. Considering that most universities promote cross-cultural relationships amongst students, faculty, and staff, storytelling is one way to encourage relationality and demystify how we view others who we may assume have little in common with us. When we listen to someone else's story we enter into a relationship with that person. Therefore, when employing a methodology such as storywork we make the research process into a relationship and take on the responsibility to be a good relative along the way.

Being a good relative can mean many different things. Although Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) discuss their 4Rs within the context of Western higher education, respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility can and should be applied broadly across contexts. In essence,

these values represent the basic building blocks for how to be a good relative. In higher education, the 4Rs serve as foundational guidelines for putting Indigenous values into action (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Although the 4Rs stem from Indigenous ways of knowing, a version these concepts can be adapted to fit other cross-cultural settings where BIPOC communities are involved. This does not mean that all cultures experience these values exactly the same; however, when it comes to decolonizing our relationships the 4Rs might provide a starting point for building mutually beneficial relationships (Carjuzaa et al., 2019; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). For Indigenous students, staff, faculty, and communities to thrive in PWIs these institutions must—at minimum—model the 4Rs or risk appearing superficial or self-serving in their efforts. Of course, it should be understood that Indigenous peoples have been, are, and will continue to be present in higher education settings. That said, practicing the 4Rs can be a helpful step in decolonizing and indigenizing spaces such as Western academic institutions that continue to function under the assumption of normative Whiteness (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, Pidgeon, 2016).

Because Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991) ideas permeate much of the scholarship relating to Indigenous higher education, I chose to organize the following literature review according to the 4Rs to illustrate how these core values are modeled by numerous scholars who prioritize Indigenous ideas, communities, and methodologies in their work. My reasoning for this stylistic choice is not unsubstantiated: nearly all of the studies reviewed cite Kirkness and Barnhardt's work as a foundational text within Indigenous educational research. In short, the 4Rs might be considered an introductory toolkit for understanding how PWIs are experienced by Indigenous peoples because they directly reflect how lived experiences—not institutional

priorities—provide non-Indigenous allies with the kind of information needed to better serve Indigenous communities (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991).

Turning towards the major influence for my methodological approach, Kovach's *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts* (2021) provides a Nêhiyaw approach that centers on *Nêhiyaw kiskêyihtamowin* (Cree epistemology) in order to holistically locate herself in the research process. Because I am Nêhiyaw and relate to Nêhiyaw kiskêyihtamowin in my daily life, I felt it was appropriate that my own work employ an approach applicable to my lived experiences. As such, Nêhiyaw-centered stories, language, and scholarship are woven throughout my research and undoubtedly influence how I interpret what it means to model good relationships. To further illustrate Nêhiyaw kiskêyihtamowin, Kovach (2021) uses the term *miyo-wîcêhtowin* to describe the Nêhiyaw ideology of maintaining good relationships with "the earth and all its inhabitants" (p. 76). In a research context, Western frameworks favor a quick, linear approach that can lead to a breach of trust between the researcher and the community. Following a Nêhiyaw approach to relationality allows researchers to decolonize that relationship by practicing a community-centered stance (Kovach, 2021). Similarly, Wilson (2008) describes that Indigenous epistemology—and in this case, Nêhiyaw kiskêyihtamowin—is rooted in relationality, which requires that we maintain relational accountability in our relationships to all other beings. Relational accountability serves as a guideline for responsible research practices, and reminds the researcher "to go beyond personal benefit to a place of collective responsibility" (O'Reilly-Scanlon et al., 2004, p. 41). Across several studies, Nêhiyaw scholars frequently return to relationality in order to emphasize the interconnectedness of their work in relation to other researchers, their communities, and the

cosmos (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Fellner, 2018; Kovach, 2010; Kovach, 2021; O'Reilly-Scanlon et al., 2004; Wilson, 2008). In all, Kovach's example of practicing miyo-wîcêhtowin as a way to give back to our communities illustrates how relationality and accountability are interconnected and never to be separated if we are to maintain good relationships (Kovach, 2021, p. 58).

Because miyo-wîcêhtowin stems from the larger concept of *wâhkôhtowin*, or relatedness, many researchers who work with Nêhiyaw communities center in on the aspect of *goodness* as a condition that must be met when working together to bring about change (Kovach, 2021; O'Reilly-Scanlon et al., 2004; Wildcat, 2018). Another Nêhiyaw scholar, Matthew Wildcat (2018) describes that "*wâhkôhtowin* encompasses the act of being related, a worldview that everything is related, and a set of laws or obligations around how to conduct good relationships" (p. 14). Overall, what we learn is that before we can have good relationships, we must first acknowledge our relatedness to everything else.

To further describe relatedness as it pertains to lived experience, I turn to the Nêhiyaw concept of *kiyâm*. Kiyâm might mean many different things to any Nêhiyaw person. Some might use it to mean "oh, well" or "it will be alright." An example of its use might be to say it at the end of a long conversation with a friend who is experiencing a tough situation. From my personal understanding and within the context of this research experience, I understand it to mean *let it be*. More specifically, I understand kiyâm as a mindset that means to give up the idea that we have control over what will happen. It means to relax into the unpredictability of lived experience (or rather, life in general) and accept that whatever will happen, will happen. This is not a nihilistic or apathetic stance; nor is it a way to get around consequence or responsibility.

Instead, kiyâm is an act of softness, acceptance, and humility. In all, kiyâm allows us to let go of the idea of perfection and instead embrace that we have done our best and ultimately cannot influence matters outside of our control. This idea is decolonial in nature, and is especially at odds with the norms of Western academia where the rigidity of bureaucracy paired with positivism would have us believe that we can produce flawless, objective scholarship based on definitive proof. Simply put, practicing kiyâm means setting aside the ego and choosing to trust in whatever happens next.

An extended commentary on this concept, McIlwraith's collection of poetry, *Kiyâm* (2012) serves as an embodiment of the acceptance we must undergo in the face of upsetting or challenging circumstances, in our relationships to others, and when coming to terms with our identities. Acknowledging her mixed background, McIlwraith explores the complexities associated with reconnecting to Nêhiyawewin as a White-presenting language learner. I relate to McIlwraith's work as I learn to reconnect to Nêhiyawewin after many years of speaking little, if any, of my language. McIlwraith's collection encouraged me to include Nêhiyawewin in this work and settle into a mindset of kiyâm as I navigate the process of re-learning the language. Indeed, after reading McIlwraith's work I became more determined to include Nêhiyawewin as part of my research, ask questions to more experienced Nêhiyawewin speakers, and join in conversation with family to help support my learning.

Undeniably, McIlwraith's poetry worked its way into this project by chance. On a sunny, slow day after most students left campus for the summer, my friend Pat and I took a lunch break field trip to the Renne Library to browse the stacks. We started in the basement in the American Indian education section, hauled up the stairs to sift through the classics, and finally ended up

pulling obscure novels like Terry Pratchett's *Mort* and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* off the shelves when I happened to come across McIlwraith's *Kiyâm*—a slim book that landed in my hands as I shuffled through titles in search of the perfect distraction from my research. As previously mentioned, there are times when we just have to trust in circumstance and believe that some things happen for a reason. This was a concept that I was not automatically comfortable with, but one that led to a deeper appreciation for my culture, my relations, and a Nêhiyaw worldview.

An added element that I enjoyed as a result of carrying *Kiyâm* with me during a trip back home to Rocky Boy was getting my family to join me in my research process as collaborators. I excitedly unpacked my ever-growing stack of Nêhiyaw literature onto the kitchen table, passing *Kiyâm* around to my mother, sister, and Nokom Anna. All us of at varying levels of Nêhiyawewin comprehension, we spent time going over simple words for different foods, colors, and objects. I admit that I did not originally see a way of working McIlwraith's poetry into my research. It seemed like just a lucky coincidence that I would come across a book titled *Kiyâm* just when I was trying to understand how this teaching could be practiced in research. But how could I include poetry in a project that had to do with the organizational structure of academia? It took only a few seconds to realize that this was such an obvious sign to embrace my own stories and relationships as true, real-world scholarship. One afternoon, Nokom Anna sat in the living room reading McIlwraith's poems in Nêhiyawewin. At that point, I came in to sit with her and asked, "Which ones are your favorites?" Soon afterwards, Nokom Anna and my sister agreed to be my collaborators, combing through lines of poetry to select epigraphs that would open each chapter of this work.

Collectively, storywork, the 4Rs, miyo-wîcêhtowin, and kiyâm as serve as foundational teachings within my research knowledge bundle. Not only do these ideas introduce the central theme of relatedness, they also help support critical self-reflection. A key aspect of identity work, critical self-reflection allows researchers to locate their position in relation to their work. O'Reilly-Scanlon et. al (2004) state that our experiences and our stories are the only knowledge sources that we can claim to own (p. 33). If our positionality is informed by our stories, and our stories are part of our personal knowledge bundles, then it is necessary to critically self-reflect on these facets of identity if we hope to produce scholarship that comes from a place of honesty. To neglect self-reflection might result in scholarship that alienates the researcher from their point of origin (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Fellner, 2018; Kovach, 2021; Penak, 2018). Honoring foundational influences at the forefront helps us explain why we have arrived at this research in the first place (Wilson, 2008). Ultimately, opening our knowledge bundles is an act of vulnerability, as it requires that we acknowledge who we are, what we have learned, and why we choose to pursue this path. In research, if we make the decision to pick up to our knowledge bundles, we reveal to all our relations the purpose for our work.

Literature Review: Indigenous Knowledges and Higher Education

Now that my foundational teachings have been laid out, I shift towards evaluating the relationship between Western academic knowledge and Indigenous epistemologies. Because I approach this section from an evaluative lens, the tone and language I use reflects Western academic writing more often than other sections in this work. That said, this section may read as more overtly Western, and I do my best to include narrative-based techniques where possible. As I lay out this review of literature, I first describe how the organizational structure of higher

education prevents Indigenous knowledges—and as a result, Indigenous professionals—from flourishing in such an environment. I then discuss how the 4Rs influence the body of scholarship surrounding Indigenous faculty and staff experiences and provide a starting point for recognizing the contributions of Indigenous professionals who work for PWIs such as MSU (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991).

It is worth noting that as a research area, the Indigenous academic workforce is a topic that bloomed out of the body of scholarship on AI/AN student experiences and university indigenization. It is an area that is becoming more widely researched and giving light to the numerous factors that keep Indigenous faculty and staff experiences at the margins, and I am humbled to be able to join in on this conversation and celebrate the contributions that Indigenous professionals bring to the academy. All that said, the following sections draw from a breadth of scholarship that brings together topics including Indigenous epistemology, IRMs, AI/AN student services, organizational theory, and finally the lived experiences of Indigenous higher education professionals. Of course, Indigenous knowledges inform the majority of these studies, and as a result it is essential to begin by describing the relationship between Indigenous knowledges and the Western academic tradition.

Because Indigenous knowledges are still largely absent from Western academic settings, especially higher education institutions, it is necessary to contextualize the dynamics in place that continue to marginalize Indigenous knowledge systems. In general, higher education institutions represent mainstream bodies of knowledge that dominant culture elevates above community-based knowledges, such as those of Indigenous peoples. That said, the type of knowledge that higher education promotes and passes on to students is unsurprisingly Western in

origin, and generally comes from a Eurocentric worldview (Smith, 2021). Where Western knowledge favors linear paths to measurable results, Indigenous knowledge prioritizes fundamental connections between all human and non-human relations (Absolon & Willett, 2004). Because Indigenous knowledges are assumed to be non-academic in nature, Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies are often absent from academic scholarship along with other non-Western (i.e., non-White) cultures. As a result of the devaluing of Indigenous thought, institutions built on Western academic ideals are inherently assimilative, and thereby tools of imperialism (Brayboy, 2005; Smith, 2021).

Broadly, Western institutions operate under settler colonial worldviews that deeply contrast with Indigenous value systems (James, 2004; Pidgeon, 2014; Pidgeon, 2016; Smith, 2021). Indeed, Western academic institutions have historically subjugated Indigenous ways of knowing (both in physically and systemically violent ways) in order to assert the assimilative power of settler colonial frameworks (Brayboy, 2005; Kuokkanen, 2003; Minthorn, 2018; Wright & Tierney, 1991). It is essential to recognize that for Indigenous peoples Western education has been used as a tool for genocide and the elimination of Indigenous identities. For example, the intergenerational damage of residential schools persists today, and it goes without saying that the lasting mistrust of Western institutions by many Indigenous communities is well deserved (Smith, 2021; Tuck, 2009; Walters et al., 2009). Although First Nations and American Indian residential schools are truly the origin point that eventually led to Indigenous students attending post-secondary institutions, the complex and heartbreaking history of residential schools is a story that I cannot hope to thoroughly cover within the scope of this work. Because K-12 education is now a norm of our current Western society, I instead look to another facet

informed by this history: American Indian higher education. Wright and Tierney (1991) note that as far back as the 1700s American Indian students began to attend what are now considered Ivy League universities due to the purely assimilative tactics of European missionaries to "Christianize" American Indians (p. 12). As the federal government took control over educating American Indians, the goal shifted from converting American Indians to Christianity to "civilizing" them through vocational training meant to integrate Indigenous peoples into dominant society (Wright & Tierney, 1991). Tribal self-determination efforts in the 1970s led to the establishment of tribally-controlled colleges on and near reservations in the United States, allowing American Indian students to seek post-secondary education and vocational training oriented towards increasing tribal economic development (Wright & Tierney, 1991). However, the destruction of Western education on Indigenous communities remains visible.

Although overt discrimination has largely faded from mainstream education, Indigenous peoples continue to experience systemic assimilation through colonial approaches to research conducted by universities. Such research tends to follow a positivist approach that assumes researcher neutrality and an objective stance on the research being produced (Smith, 2021). In contrast, an Indigenous research framework does not claim neutrality and recognizes how the researcher's social position and relationships shape their research (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008). A tool of imperialism, positivist research operates under an "insider/outsider" paradigm that assumes that the researcher will serve as an outsider who is exempt from "being implicated in the scene" (Smith, 2021, p. 157). Leaders in Indigenous-centered research, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021) and Kim TallBear (2019) point out that the continuation of positivism in educational research is problematic for at least two reasons,

namely: 1) it infers a neutrality of Whiteness, given that much Western academic research happens within PWIs; and 2) it suggests that such neutrality results in a kind of *pure* research or scholarship that resides at the pinnacle of academic knowledge. Given this Western stance on academic knowledge production, Indigenous scholars and professionals must work tirelessly towards legitimizing the place of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing within academic contexts (Brayboy, 2005; Pete, 2016; Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008; Windchief & Ryan, 2019). Considering that community-based knowledge is still undermined within academic scholarship, it is no question that Indigenous values, knowledges, and stories are largely absent from conversations in mainstream academic institutions. To address this problem, we must employ strategies that sustain Indigenous ways of knowing in Western academic contexts.

Following Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991) lead—not to mention the foundation laid by numerous Indigenous scholars—how we begin to elevate Indigenous knowledges in higher education is through example. That is, by employing IRMs, promoting Indigenous-centered values, and practicing strategies such as storywork in our daily practices as higher education professionals, we can begin to do our part in transforming how Western institutions actually serve Indigenous peoples. Although I outline these studies according to their connections to Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991) 4Rs, there are many other teachings that must be kept in mind when attempting any kind of institutional transformation. Stories concerning competing accountabilities, contradictory values, bureaucratic culture, decolonizing strategies, and critical stances on institutional priorities too make up the body of scholarship pertaining to Indigenous higher education (Absolon, 2021; Bazemore-James & Dunn, 2020; Brayboy, 2005, James, 2004; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Lacourt, 2003; Smith, 2021; TallBear, 2019). Together, these ideas

reflect the central theme of maintaining good relationships in educational contexts. This can be summed up as the central purpose of the current study, and the following discussion provides further support for why this work is needed at PWIs.

Respecting Indigenous Values in the Academy

At the forefront, respect is a core teaching that many Indigenous people are taught to model in all relationships (Adams et al., 2015; Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2021; Minthorn, 2018; Wilson, 2008). Although it may seem obvious, definitions of respect are not the same across all cultures. In an academic or business professional context, respect is largely associated with a kind of formal professionalism that can be linked to hierarchical relationships, bureaucracy, and dominant culture standards (James, 2004). For Indigenous communities, many of these same values might be reminiscent of the strict rules enforced on Indigenous children in residential schools and the paternalistic "guardian-ward" relationship described by Chief Justice Marshall during the *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) ruling (Getches et al., 2016; Wright & Tierney, 1991). With this in mind, we should consider that much of the decorum we follow as academic professionals is embedded in a legacy of settler colonial power dynamics, including what Smith (2021) calls the "positional superiority" of Western knowledges that demarcates geographical boundaries between European territories and "new" or still yet "undiscovered" worlds occupied by Indigenous peoples (p. 68-69). Western professionalism still reflects positional superiority in its emphasis on universalized acceptable behaviors that call back to the imperialist rejection of what were considered "savage" lifeways (Smith, 2021). Therefore, what we might consider respectful in the academy may not be seen the same way in an Indigenous community.

Given the degree to which universities represent Western intellectualism, many Indigenous scholars critique Western academic institutions according to their perceptiveness to Indigenous epistemologies as legitimate sources of knowledge (Absolon, 2021; Bazemore-James & Dunn, 2020; Brayboy, 2005; Pete, 2016). For most Indigenous peoples, elders represent the pinnacle of ancestral knowledge. Often called "knowledge keepers," elders are afforded the utmost respect not simply due to age and experience, but because they are carriers of sacred traditional knowledge and the educators of the next generation (Archibald, 2008; Wilson, 2008). Archibald (2008) states that not everyone who has lived a long life is an elder; instead, an elder is determined by the extent to which one is respected by others and how they go about sharing their knowledge with others (p. 3). Most higher education institutions consider holders of doctoral degrees with the level of respect afforded to elders, but often do not often make space for Indigenous knowledge keepers as verifiable educators. Some institutions situate an Indigenous advisory board to help inform their policies and educational practices. A decolonizing strategy, putting such advisory boards in place is a way for an institution to show that it is serious about university indigenization; however, if an advisory board does not have decision-making authority over matters concerning Indigenous communities, what does this really say about an institution's respect for knowledge keepers? Until Indigenous ancestral knowledge is respected in formal educational settings, Indigenous epistemologies will continue to be overlooked in such spaces.

As previously mentioned, IRMs offer a pathway for Indigenous inclusion in higher education. Since IRMs directly reflect Indigenous values, undermining these methodologies can be painful for Indigenous students, researchers, and communities and may damage relationships

between universities and Indigenous communities. Considering the painful and complex history between Indigenous peoples and the Western education system, dismissal of Indigenous values in higher education can only further drive a wedge between Indigenous peoples and research institutions. If research institutions wish to continue to undertake Indigenous-centered projects, using IRMs to conduct such projects can help these institutions show respect for Indigenous communities and avoid producing scholarship that results in damaging narratives or deficit statistics that promote stereotyping (Tuck, 2009; Walters & Andersen, 2013). Rather than singularly endorsing Western methodologies and thereby Western knowledges, higher education institutions should consider teaching and employing IRMs more widely across disciplines (Kovach, 2021). It cannot be put upon Indigenous Studies departments alone to teach students and faculty how to ethically and respectfully use IRMs in their research. In sum, higher education institutions will only continue to meet the status quo if they neglect to acknowledge the ways that Indigenous epistemologies can guide them towards healing relationships between the education system and Indigenous communities.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) remind us that for First Nations students, “the university represents an impersonal, intimidating, and often hostile environment” that neglects to recognize or respect cultural knowledge or community-based values (p. 6). For Indigenous students, this means that experiences and skills such as speaking their original languages, participating in ceremony, traditional arts, and many more valuable knowledges often go unacknowledged. Indigenous faculty and staff are not exempt from experiencing higher education in similar ways. While many Indigenous professionals working in universities are familiar with the process of navigating this system, obstacles to their success still remain. Absolon (2021) describes that

Indigenous faculty members are challenged with balancing university-based responsibilities and community-based pursuits. In her experience, the academy rarely, if ever, takes into consideration the cultural leadership and community service that Indigenous faculty and staff perform in their home communities when it comes to evaluation criteria, program funding, and staff recognition (Absolon, 2021, p. 68).

The struggle for Indigenous professionals to receive recognition for their community and cultural contributions outside of the university is widespread. Indigenous faculty and staff might also assist with ceremonies, teach language to their children or other community members, construct powwow regalia, provide stewardship over community gardens, participate in activism, or volunteer for urban Indigenous-serving organizations (Absolon, 2021; Bazemore-James & Dunn, 2020; Lacourt, 2003; Steinman & Scoggins, 2020; Walters et al., 2019). Many, many, other culturally-based activities keep Indigenous professionals connected to their cultures and communities outside of the academy. According to Absolon (2021) and Walters et al. (2019) respectively, Indigenous faculty often feel that their culturally-based responsibilities are considered secondary to their academic-oriented work and are frequently diminished and dismissed by the academy. However, on a positive note, when the academy makes space for cultural, community-oriented activities these opportunities can be extremely rewarding and empowering for Indigenous professionals (Absolon, 2021; Fellner, 2018; Lacourt, 2003; Minthorne, 2018; Tippeconic Fox, 2005). For instance, involving family in university-sponsored events, providing opportunities to teach beadwork or powwow dancing classes, and simply spending time with other Indigenous colleagues can help Indigenous professionals feel culturally connected within the university environment (Absolon, 2021; Minthorn, 2018).

Locating the Relevance of Indigenous Knowledges

In their *nahongvita* model, which they describe as "one's inner strength" Indigenous scholars Joseph and Windchief (2015) distinguish the difference between capital "H" Home and lower-case "h" home for Indigenous communities (p. 80). In essence, *Home* is a source of cultural connection, family, and community, while *home* is a secondary site where Indigenous communities can connect to others who may share similar cultural practices, such as in an urban higher education setting (Joseph & Windchief, 2015, pp. 80-83). When students are provided with the resources, kinship practices, and cultural connection associated with Home, secondary homes can get closer to meeting the needs of Indigenous students, staff, faculty, and communities who must fight for adequate support in large, urban universities where, on the surface, there are few options for cultural engagement.

Tribal college educators and scholars HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) describe a similar model called the Family Education Model (FEM) that emphasizes a commitment to cultural values, collaboration between students, researchers, faculty, and communities, sustained communication between a college, students, and their families, and evaluation of the efficacy of retention efforts (p. 32). Both the nahongvita and FEM models are examples of how universities can provide relevant service to Indigenous communities. Because it is a challenge to employ the values these models prioritize in a PWI due to bureaucratic obstacles, lack of staff, and lack of buy-in from the institution, universities as a whole must get on board with Indigenous-centered strategies in order to improve the relevance of their programming meant for Indigenous groups. Additionally, when Indigenous voices help inform the strategies and initiatives that a university

chooses to invest in, this can help ensure that these approaches are successful and long-lasting (Pete, 2016).

Both nahongvita and FEM models emphasize kinship as a central attribute of a successful education model. Even though these models focus on student experiences, Indigenous and Indigenous-serving professionals can also benefit from an environment that embraces values such as kinship and cultural connection. Carjuzaa et al. (2019) conducted a case study of five AI/AN pre-service teachers who participated in the Society of Indigenous Educators (SINE) mentoring program at MSU, reporting that SINE's "culturally congruent" approaches to mentorship positively impacted AI/AN students' professional development, resiliency, and motivation to complete their degrees (p. 19). While this study is still student-focused, it specifically situates culturally relevant approaches within professional development and especially emphasizes relationality as an essential factor in reported student outcomes (Carjuzaa et al., 2019, p. 17). This suggests that relationality is a crucial part of career development for emerging AI/AN professionals, and that a strong family-like dynamic can help foster resiliency for those of us navigating our Indigenous identities amidst the backdrop of a PWI (Carjuzaa, et al., 2019).

Overall, kinship may be one of the most vital sources of empowerment for Indigenous peoples—both within a community-based context and within the academy, and is of utmost relevance in maintaining supportive relationships and holistic wellness (Absolon, 2010; Absolon, 2021; Carjuzaa, et al. 2019; HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Joseph & Windchief, 2015; Kuokkanen, 2003; Minthorn, 2018; Penak, 2018; Wildcat, 2018). Because an understanding of Indigenous kinship systems is necessary for being a good relative to others, we must consider

how Indigenous families model such values. Kiowa educator Robin Zape-tah-hol-ah Minthorn (2018) points out that we are taught how to be a good relative through the ancestral teachings of our elders and parents, especially through mother figures. As a mother, Minthorn offers "Indigenous motherhood" as an approach for rebuilding our understandings of kinship in the academy. Minthorn (2018) states, "Indigenous motherhood is looking out for others, which includes not only remembering our communities' core values and teaching them but also emulating them in our daily lives" (p. 69). Indigenous mothering as a decolonizing strategy invites an openness for kinship in spaces where Indigenous values might not otherwise be present. Often, the academy is not a place where kinship is fostered among professionals due to its competitive, individualistic nature. However, modelling respectful, welcoming behaviors as we do with our relations seems to be an effective strategy for supporting our colleagues and students and shifting towards a more hospitable environment for Indigenous peoples (Kuokkanen, 2003; Minthorn, 2018).

Towards Reciprocity and Building Non-Indigenous Allies

When pursuing institutional transformation, employing Indigenous knowledges, and involving Indigenous communities in their work, non-Indigenous allies should take care to avoid imposing harmful strategies that might exacerbate the axiological division between Western frameworks and Indigenous frameworks, especially since comparisons between Western and Indigenous worldviews continuously pose Indigenous knowledge systems as "vanishing," archaic, or illegitimate sources of academic theory (Archibald, 2008; Brayboy, 2005; TallBear, 2013; Walters et al., 2009). When it comes to university indigenization, one way to prevent such harm is to avoid viewing Indigenous communities, students, faculty, and staff as disadvantaged

or oppressed (Tuck, 2009). Some scholars such as TallBear argue that instruments of the settler-state can never really be decolonized (TallBear, 2019). However, if non-Indigenous allies can be educated in such a way that prioritizes Indigenous epistemologies, it may be possible to decolonize an institution in small increments. By showing an ongoing commitment to Indigenous communities through decolonized approaches to service, research, and teaching practices, non-Indigenous allies can begin to play a more significant role in diversity and inclusion work (Pete, 2016; Walters et al. 2009).

If universities are serious about building and maintaining reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities, it is necessary for non-Indigenous stakeholders to step up to the challenge of educational decolonization. Pete (2016) states that "academic indigenizing is designed to support the reform of faculty's instructional, planning, and evaluation practices," meaning that faculty play an important role in initiating institutional transformation (p. 82). If implemented according to Indigenous values such as the 4Rs, faculty and staff training and professional development initiatives can help transform the relationships that universities have with Indigenous groups (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Pidgeon, 2016). Although Indigenous professionals tend to take the lead with these efforts, indigenization requires non-Indigenous allies because they tend to occupy higher-level and more professional roles at PWIs (Pidgeon, 2016). Furthermore, Indigenous faculty and staff are challenged with juggling inherently opposing values systems as a result of their dual accountability to both Western academic institutions and Indigenous communities (Absolon, 2021; Bazemore-James & Dunn, 2020; James, 2004; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Steinman & Scoggins, 2020). If non-Indigenous allies are to assist their Indigenous colleagues with indigenization, they too must exhibit accountability

to Indigenous communities. In all, it cannot continue to fall on Indigenous professionals to translate the needs of Indigenous peoples back to the institution; the institution must be willing to undertake the same challenges it thrusts upon its Indigenous employees by actively choosing to step outside of its normative practices.

It should be clear that decolonizing and indigenizing an academic institution means more than hanging up Indigenous artwork and learning the names and locations of local Indigenous groups. In his explanation of Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit), Brayboy (2005) states that the Western education system is fundamentally assimilative, but employing indigenized frameworks to understand lived experiences as legitimate knowledge sources can be a powerful step in promoting Indigenous self-determination in university settings. Indigenous theoretical frameworks like TribalCrit offer a nuanced approach to decolonizing educational institutions because they are based in ancestral traditions and epistemologies rather than Western imperialism (Brayboy, 2005; Smith, 2021). It might seem overly ambitious to try to implement Indigenous theoretical frameworks on an institutional level, but again, small actions can initiate change. For instance, many universities practice common core standards for their general education curriculum. Consider how these standards could be shifted if masterworks like Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* had their place on the reading lists of more classes than just graduate-level Indigenous studies courses.

While getting non-Indigenous allies to buy into university indigenizing may sound like a simple step, it is surely a process that will take lots of time. First, someone must train allies to perform this work with reciprocity and relationality in mind. Yet who but Indigenous faculty and staff are equipped to provide such training? Given that Indigenous faculty and staff tend to lead

the way in indigenization efforts, they also perform what Steinman and Scoggins (2020) call "hidden contributions," or "extraordinary efforts and contributions of time, status, relationships, labor, caring, and availability that are above and beyond that formally expected by individuals" (p. 79). These contributions are necessary to Indigenous student success given that they typically relate to culturally-specific challenges that non-Indigenous faculty and staff are not privy to, yet the Indigenous professionals who take on these added responsibilities cannot be expected to successfully maintain this massive workload on their own (Bazemore-James & Dunn, 2020; Kuokkanen, 2003; Pidgeon, 2016; Steinman & Scoggins, 2020; Tippeconic Fox, 2005; Walters et al., 2019). Non-Indigenous allies surely have a responsibility to learn from their Indigenous colleagues and students, but the institution too can exhibit reciprocity by inviting Indigenous elders to share their knowledge, creating more positions that support its Indigenous stakeholders, and practicing respectful, equitable, and decolonized hiring practices.

As a reminder, non-Indigenous allies and PWIs as a whole should not assume that simply listening to the experiences of Indigenous professionals means that they too will absorb diversity or indigeneity by proxy. Committed allies are just that—non-Indigenous learners who are willing to show up for Indigenous students, colleagues, and communities even when no one is watching. Not everyone who works for a PWI will want to make this commitment; however, few truly devoted allies might accomplish more than many apathetic allies who may only chose to opt in out of perceived obligation. Ultimately, in order to indigenize a PWI, Indigenous values must become part of the fabric of the institution—from its recruitment strategies to it strategic plans (Pete, 2016; Pidgeon, 2014; Pidgeon, 2016).

Defining Indigenous "Responsibility" in Higher Education

Undeniably, higher education institutions have a responsibility to show support for Indigenous communities if they choose to continue with targeted efforts to recruit Indigenous students. Following culturally appropriate guidelines like those provided by Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), institutions should be responsible for showing at least an introductory-level understanding of the values held by surrounding Indigenous communities before asking anything of these communities. Bazemore-James and Dunn (2020) point out that Indigenous Student Affairs (ISA) professionals play a huge role in ensuring that PWIs follow through with their responsibility to support Indigenous students. While ISA programs are essential to Indigenous student retention, Bazemore-James and Dunn (2020) found that many of these programs lack support, adequate funding, and are severely understaffed (pp. 21-22). ISA staff and Indigenous faculty share the responsibility of handling numerous priorities while meeting the high expectations of their institutions. If Indigenous faculty and staff continue to take it upon themselves to handle the majority of their institution's responsibilities to Indigenous communities, PWIs may neglect to recognize and address the crucial need for additional support for their Indigenous workers. Many PWIs are already at risk for burning out Indigenous employees, underserving Indigenous students, and failing to keep their promises to Indigenous communities (Bazemore-James, 2020; Pidgeon, 2016; Steinman & Scoggins, 2020; Walters et al., 2019). This means that promises to implement university-wide indigenization cannot remain superficial. Though it may go unnoticed, there is an urgent need for PWIs to prove their commitment to successful Indigenous student, staff, and faculty outcomes.

In addition to the responsibilities related to their specific positions, many Indigenous professionals are also called upon for their input as underrepresented minorities. This might mean sitting on task forces for minority recruitment, assisting with diversity-oriented events, or leading DEI workshops and seminars. Although participating in additional recruitment, retention, and diversity awareness projects is an important and rewarding aspect of higher education work, many university departments lack adequate staff to address both administrative and direct-service needs simultaneously. BIPOC faculty and staff, though few in numbers, fill an essential role in university settings as keepers of cultural knowledge. When the value of this knowledge is realized it can present as both a victory and a problem for underrepresented groups. Opportunities for stereotyping, tokenizing, and burn out are just a few of the risks that universities can run into if BIPOC professionals are continuously expected to manage the bulk of the work pertaining to BIPOC student support and DEI efforts. (Bazemore-James, 2020; Steinman & Scoggins, 2020; Walters et al., 2019).

To better understand the challenges experienced by Indigenous faculty, Walters et al. (2019) investigated the lived experiences of 25 AI/AN tenure-track faculty at various research institutions. They found that factors including "role overload, role ambiguity, and vocational stress were significantly associated with poor health, mental health, and poor work-life balance" for participants in their study (Walters et al., 2019, p. 626). In particular, cultural taxation—or additional, often unpaid and unrewarded duties placed upon underrepresented minority faculty members—was cited as a common experience for AI/AN faculty, including the caretaking of AI/AN students and filling diversity gaps for various university initiatives (Walters et al., 2019). Heartbreakingly, one participant reflected that "My husband wants me to quit *before they kill my*

spirit entirely" (Walters et al., 2019, p. 622). No university employee should ever be at risk for such a loss as a result of occupational challenges. In particular, Walters et al. (2019) provide an eye-opening reality for all universities: much is at risk and we are responsible for preventing harm.

Considering the general mistrust that Indigenous communities have for Western institutions, empty promises can only cause further damage. If an institution truly seeks to transform its relationships to underrepresented communities, it must be willing to look inward and reflect on its organizational culture. Tierney (1988) reminds higher education administrators that evaluating the organizational culture of their institutions is necessary for initiating change and reaching institutional goals such as increased enrollment or improved retention rates. Of course, implementing decolonized approaches to research, recruitment, student services, classroom etiquette, and employee support first requires that higher education institutions are up for the challenge to self-evaluate with honesty, humility, and a willingness to learn. As Tierney (1988) states, "we no longer need to tolerate the consequences of our ignorance, nor, for that matter, will a rapidly changing environment permit us to do so" (p. 6). Although all 4Rs are crucial for PWIs to maintain relational accountability, perhaps the reality of the responsibility that academic institutions carry holds the most weight. As I reflect on the studies cited in this review of literature, it seems clear that continuing to operate according to the status quo will not suffice. In closing, we must be willing to show up and put in the work to be good relatives to each other in the academy.

CHAPTER THREE

MIYO-WÎCÊHTOWIN: METHODOLOGY

Overview of Methodological Approach

You said, "Stand in your own truth,"

and now that's where you're standing:

on your own patch of truth

nîpawi kitâpwêwinihk

—Naomi McIlwraith, "sôhkikâpawi, nitôtêm – Stand Strong, My Friend"

I now turn towards describing Nêhiyaw philosophical beliefs and theoretical frameworks that inform miyo-wîcêhtowin as a research methodology. This section further clarifies how Nêhiyaw beliefs, practices, and ethical understandings provide a way for me, as a Nêhiyaw person, to draw connections between cultural knowledge and research methods. While ontology, axiology, and methodology, respectively, are typically understood as worldviews, values, and a set system of methods in the Western tradition, it is difficult to separate these aspects of Nêhiyaw knowledge in such a clear-cut way. Each aspect of Nêhiyaw kiskêyihtamowin is closely tied to the next and much cross over exists. No single aspect is divorced from the other when applying a methodological approach informed by an Indigenous paradigm (Wilson, 2008). That said, it is necessary to describe how a Nêhiyaw theoretical framework functions when brought into conversation with Western concepts as such ontology, axiology, and methodology.

In this chapter, I begin by outlining three levels of a Nêhiyaw theoretical framework: *miyo-tôtamowin* (good actions), *miyo-wîcêhtowin* (good relations), and *wâhkôhtowin*

(relatedness). These three facets of a Nêhiyaw worldview are by no means a complete reflection of Nêhiyaw ways of life. I present these concepts together as one example of a Nêhiyaw theoretical framework that can be applied as an Indigenous methodology in qualitative research. Next, I describe three aspects to think about when working with Indigenous collaborators as part of an Indigenous-centered research project: *âcimowin* (story), *wîcihitowak* (a partnership, or 'they help one another'), and *atoskêwin* (work or labor). In describing these elements, I center on reciprocity as an essential factor to consider when researchers choose to conduct research with (not *on*) Indigenous people (Kovach, 2021; Smith, 2021; Tuck, 2009).

Ultimately, what I present here is what I have come to understand as a Nêhiyaw researcher and should be considered just one perspective of Nêhiyaw beliefs. I do not represent all Nêhiyaw people, nor do I represent all Indigenous researchers. Rather, I am a learner who only aims to share what I know to be true having undertaken this area of inquiry. Kovach (2021) offers the Nêhiyawewin term *tâpwê*—or truth—to describe what we see as valid sources of knowledge. She states, "our stories, our research, are our tâpwê" (Kovach, 2021, p. 99). What follows are the philosophical foundations that led me to my understanding of tâpwê and informed the methodological process I followed as part of this research.

Miyo-tôtamowin: Good Ways of Doing

First, it is important to describe how Nêhiyaw beliefs are manifest in certain behaviors. Kovach (2021) articulates that a *miyo* (good) ethic supports an approach that holds researchers accountable to community, and is also a core tenet of living in reciprocity with all other beings (p. 98; 132). Broadly, miyo describes goodness and linguistically prefaces concepts that suggest goodness. Any term or phrase beginning with *miyo-* is representative of a favorable behavior or

state of mind. Miyo-tôtamowin reflects an approach to living in a good way according to our behaviors. Translated from Nêhiyawewin, miyo-tôtamowin refers to good deeds or good actions. In the context of this work, I present miyo-tôtamowin as an essential step towards developing miyo-wîcêhtowin*:* in order to build good relationships, we must first practice good actions. If miyo-wîcêhtowin is to be understood as a methodological approach, then miyo-tôtamowin can be thought of as the axiological process that informs how methods are carried out according to a Nêhiyaw value system.

Practicing miyo-tôtamowin naturally implies a dynamic between the self and other beings wherein good actions or deeds are not individually motivated; instead, they involve a reciprocal feedback loop which strengthens our relationships to others. In order to uphold a measure of relational accountability, good actions should not be performed for self-serving reasons if they are to fulfill the wider purpose of keeping good relations (Wilson, 2008). From my understanding and upbringing in a Nêhiyaw family, doing things in a good way means following our teachings in the way they are meant to be done according to our elders. As a result, miyo-tôtamowin might be thought of as a facet of Nêhiyaw axiology, which directly influences Nêhiyaw methodology.

If the methodologies we employ are informed by our ontological beliefs or understanding of the world, a Nêhiyaw methodology reflects how we go about doing things in a good way. How do we conduct ourselves in a good way? According to Kovach (2021), our ethical standards dictate how we go about enacting relationality, and are ultimately concerned with goodness. The specific actions or protocols associated with miyo-tôtamowin understandably vary according to family practices, traditions, teachings, and cultural values shared within a community. Every

Nêhiyaw family or community might describe miyo-tôtamowin in a slightly different way according to the way they were taught. In my experiences as a young person attending ceremony and spending time with elders, I learned early on that the actions we take serve a purpose beyond simply maintaining social norms. We do everything for a reason. In this sense, good ways of doing reflect a particular ontological stance that signifies what it means to be Nêhiyawak. Just how we go about conveying that stance is guided by an axiological approach that stems from Nêhiyaw legal traditions (Wildcat, 2018). In research, miyo-tôtamowin might serve as the ethical guidelines that researchers must follow as they enter into the social contract of what it means to work in harmony with others. According to Wilson (2008), if we are to participate in the ceremony of research we must uphold our obligations to pursue research with a good heart and in a good way. In this sense, miyo-tôtamowin are ethical actions.

Miyo-wîcêhtowin: Good Relations

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I situate miyo-wîcêhtowin as a methodological approach for conducting relational research. As a research methodology, practicing good relations is not about maintaining my personal agenda for the sake of productivity. Instead, it means working in relation and in flux with everyone and everything involved with the process. This might be difficult for researchers to honor because of the responsibility we feel to constantly produce work. As researchers, we can get tunnel vision about what best serves us and may neglect to consider how everything else around us is affected by our actions. Yet, there is no question that research is relational work. Situating myself according to Nêhiyaw ways of knowing means that I am holding myself accountable to my Nêhiyaw community, my family, my colleagues, my collaborators, my university, and all the rest of my relations. I chose to

conduct this research in this way, so I must follow through accordingly. However, I also have a responsibility to protect traditional knowledge and know when certain stories, practices, and information must be kept sacred. When sharing ancestral knowledge in a research context, Kovach (2021) states that "ceremonies, protocols, and ways of Nêhiyaw people cannot be separated from their underlying relational values" and cautions that we must be mindful of how much we share in this Western academic space (p. 87). Our actions—including our research—cannot be divorced from our values, but some teachings are not to be experienced outside of their intended context. Because of this understanding, I do not attempt to describe specific Nêhiyaw ceremonial practices in this work. Rather, I approach research as a process akin to ceremony that requires great care in applying appropriate protocols. As a Nêhiyaw learner, I look to Nêhiyaw teachings as the overarching guidelines for conducting myself in a good way, but must remember that I am still learning and reconnecting. In the end, I can only share truths that I have come to know through my limited experiences.

Because there are legal implications associated with certain Nêhiyaw teachings, the principle of miyo-wîcêhtowin itself refers to a deep responsibility to act in a good way that goes beyond just following what might be considered "best practices." In their collection of insights from elders of Saskatchewan, Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrand (2000) describe the legal bearing of wâhkôhtowin as "the laws governing all relations," and branching off of this concept they define miyo-wîcêhtowin as "the laws concerning good relations" (p. 14). Thus, from a Nêhiyaw standpoint, maintaining good relations requires that we follow a certain legal code, including the practice of relational actions such as miyo-tôtamowin. This is why the doctrine of miyo-wîcêhtowin carries such weight: Nêhiyaw laws are not mere recommendations for

practicing respect or kindness. To relate this idea to an academic context, I think about Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991) 4Rs as not just as suggestions for creating welcoming educational spaces, but as ethical and perhaps even legal responsibilities that higher education institutions must uphold. As such, I hold myself to the cultural-ethical-legal standards of a Nêhiyaw person and consider my responsibility to be a good relative of utmost importance.

Wâhkôhtowin: Relatedness

Nêhiyaw epistemology and ontology originate in the idea of wâhkôhtowin as a responsibility to coexist in harmony with all others (Cardinal & Hildebrand, 2000; Wildcat, 2018). Where Wilson (2008) describes relationality as the essence of an Indigenous research paradigm, wâhkôhtowin can be thought of as the core of a Nêhiyaw theoretical framework. In my own process of reconnecting and learning how to apply Nêhiyaw theory, I think about the Nêhiyaw ways of knowing I describe in this chapter as a star quilt. Wâhkôhtowin is the quilt itself: it encompasses the purpose of a blanket or covering, the act of acquiring the materials required to make the quilt, and the process by which the quilt is constructed. Miyo-wîcêhtowin is embodied in the pieces of cloth that comprise the quilt's pattern: each section of cloth is necessary for the quilt to come together and as they are sewn together piece by piece an image begins to emerge. Finally, miyo-tôtamowin is the process of measuring the cloth, cutting out sections, and physically stitching them together: it is comprised of a series of actions that reflect how the quilt is made. When I think about a star quilt, I think about it as a gift to be shared with someone that reflects an important relationship. Amongst many American Indian people today, a star quilt is often thought of as a gift that signifies respect and honors the contributions of an individual who has accomplished something reflective of goodness. Often given away at

powwows, awards ceremonies, or even at retirement celebrations, the star quilt is a symbol of reciprocity, a way of recognizing good actions and maintaining good relationships, and overall a representation of relatedness.

Âcimowin: Research as Storytelling

This research is fundamentally centered on storytelling and sharing *âcimowin* (a story) as an act of relationality. When sharing stories, we build relationships with others and take part in the reciprocal practice of exchanging knowledge. In essence, to tell a story is to bestow knowledge through relationship. Thus, receiving a story is receiving a gift. As Indigenous people, our traditions dictate that there are appropriate protocols in place for both the processes of giving a gift and receiving a gift, especially when it comes to the exchange of cultural knowledge (Kovach, 2021). Cultural protocols provide a pathway for coming to knowledge in a good way. As a method for giving and receiving knowledge, storytelling allows us to relay cultural truths, build trusting relationships, and sustain our ways of life (Archibald, 2008; Windchief & Ryan, 2018). For these reasons, storytelling is inherently pedagogical and plays a significant educational role within Indigenous communities (Adams et al., 2015; Archibald, 2008).

As a teaching method, storytelling can act as a bridge between cultures and give voice to our communities. Story teaches us who we are and where we come from, and enables us to recognize the significance of our own identities so that we can begin to respect the identities of others. As a learning strategy, storytelling offers an experiential approach to receiving cultural knowledge and teaches the listener to trust that meaning will be made (Adams et al., 2015). In this sense, trust is required on two levels: the storyteller must trust that the listener is ready to

receive knowledge and pass it on in a good way, and the listener must trust that knowledge will emerge from the story. Because trust is a crucial element of storytelling, it is undoubtedly a method that relies on relationality and reciprocity.

Wîcihitowak: Research as Helping Each Other

As I developed this project, I reflected on several opportunities for our university to practice relationality with Indigenous professionals. I wondered, what can this research provide for Indigenous professionals? In particular, one opportunity that I encountered in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2021) chapter "Twenty Further Indigenous Projects," was "refocusing emotional and cultural labor" (pp. 204-205). This is perhaps where my research started. Indigenous higher education professionals are so frequently asked to share knowledge related to their identities and as a result can become fatigued from this form of cultural labor alone (Walters et al., 2019). Instead of asking Indigenous professionals to solve issues of Indigenous representation, perhaps listening to their stories could better inform how an institution designs their strategic plans. This opportunity relies on reciprocity to drive change, and requires that the listener be ready to learn whatever lessons the storyteller deems important. I was reminded of the term *wîcihitowak* (they help each other), and hoped to model this idea as I sat down to listen to my collaborators. When I reframed my research as an opportunity to help each other, I saw how obvious it was that reciprocity was often the missing piece to many institutional relationships.

When my Nokom Sylvia was teaching me to speak Nêhiyawewin as a child, she would never tell me how to say a phrase until I asked for help in our language. I might say that I forgot the word or that I didn't know, but she would stand firm until I asked correctly. "Wîcihin, wîcihin!" I would cry when I got stuck. Then she would usually laugh and remind me, and I

could pass this strategy on to my friends and classmates who were also learning the language. Nokom Sylvia taught me a lesson in learning to ask for help in the right way so that I could go about passing on what I knew. Rethinking how we ask for help can be one way of mitigating the strain that cultural taxation causes for Indigenous professionals (Walters et al., 2019). Ultimately, asking for help cannot be transactional if we are to build genuine relationships. Instead, when bringing collaborators to the table to help us, we should think about what we can do to support their communities as well.

For my part, I cannot deny that my research is motivated by the personal challenges I experience as an Indigenous woman working for a PWI. However, what truly drives my motivation to conduct this research is the opportunity to shed light on the goodness Indigenous professionals bring to the university. I feel a responsibility to advocate for the recognition of my Indigenous colleagues and collaborators who inspire me to fight harder, love more deeply, and ultimately encourage me to continue pursuing this work. I owe much of my success thus far to their support and understanding, and therefore feel more strongly about elevating their voices than amplifying my own. Nonetheless, as a researcher my personal goals are still very much a part of this work. Due to my position as both a student and a professional, I am afforded the privilege of experiencing the higher education system at two different angles and can leverage my experience to design opportunities from both an academic research standpoint and an administrative lens. All that I have learned about IRMs, indigenization, relationality, and Nêhiyaw theory has helped bolster my professional work in ways I could never have fathomed prior to my experience as a student. Moving forward with miyo-wîcêhtowin in mind, I believe

that this particular exercise in storywork may support a kind of healing process for myself, my collaborators, and our university that is rooted in helping each other.

Atoskêwin: Research as Labor

Although I took care to do this work with a good heart, challenges inevitably popped up at various stages of the process. It is no question that the work we do in academia is a form of labor regardless of whether it involves physical, intellectual, cultural, or emotional work. Considering my positionality to the institution, I am privy to the emotional exertion and patience that the academic labor economy requires. Though it is much more intuitive to me as a Nêhiyaw person than it may be for a non-Indigenous person, Indigenous-centered research is still an incredibly challenging undertaking because the higher education system has so long rejected this type of knowledge production as a valid form of scholarship (Absolon, 2021; Brayboy, 2005; Kovach, 2021). While IRMs provide a culturally relevant starting point for Indigenous scholars, conducting this kind of research is not in any sense "easier" than applying Western academic methods. If anything, Indigenous research is even more complex because cultural protocols require more time, closer relationships between the researcher and participants, and accessing traditional knowledge is much more involved than simply gathering library sources. Nonetheless, I am not the only participant in this research who made the effort to shape this project into what it is. In fact, my collaborators provided much more substance to this work than I could have done alone. As qualitative researchers, we must acknowledge that without our collaborators our research stands still. The labor involved with being a research participant requires knowledge that the researcher does *not* have. That said, our collaborators are our teachers, and their labor is not subordinate to ours.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ê-ÂCIMOCIK: THEY ARE TELLING STORIES

Procedural Considerations for Mixed Indigenous-Settler Research Methods

confident and eloquent

ê-sôhkêyimocik êkwa ê-nihtâwêcik

tell me a story

ê-âcimostawicik

—Naomi McIlwraith, "ihkatawâw ay-itwêhiwêw – The Marsh Sends a Message"

While rooted in Nêhiyaw understandings of relatedness, this research inevitably involves a mix of Indigenous and settler approaches to research. This particular study came with limitations that prevented me from staying true to some aspects of an Indigenous methodology, such as keeping a story within its context. Namely, this had to do with the challenges associated with inviting collaborators from a such a small pool of individuals. I was deeply concerned with maintaining confidentiality but wanted to ensure that each collaborator's identity was in no way implicated based on the stories they shared. Without question it was more crucial that I maintain confidentiality than share detailed stories that could potentially reveal a collaborator's identity. In the end, I decided that the information I shared must be reported mostly in aggregate rather than as a series of individual collaborator profiles. This was not an easy choice to make, but one that was necessary to ensure that I uphold ethical guidelines. As a result, the stories I report on in this chapter have been distanced from their specific contexts to greater extent than I would prefer. Direct quotes are situated within the context of major themes, but any details that suggest

a collaborator's role, tribal affiliation, or involvement with a particular department had to be withheld in order to honor confidentiality. Even though this changed my original vision, this challenge ensured that I share no story that was not my own.

Secondly, designing the analysis phase of this work also posed some challenges to relationality. To analyze someone's personal experiences is to take their story out of context and pick apart the meaning until some desirable elements surface that are of interest to me, as researcher. The concept of data analysis is in itself reflective of a positivist approach where the researcher is mainly concerned with arriving at objective conclusions based on their interpretation of information (Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008). However, this facet of Western qualitative research is contradictory to an Indigenous approach as it lacks humility, assumes the researcher knows something about the topic that the participants do not, and ultimately breaks down the validity of the participants' experiences by extracting only those parts deemed relevant (Smith, 2021; Tuck, 2009; Walters et al. 2009). However, Archibald (2008) offers an approach that decolonizes analysis by taking time to reflect on the knowledge that a storyteller shares and asking yourself what it is they want you to learn (pp. 43-47). This involved setting aside my personal motivations and instead listening to the story that the collaborator needed to tell. Recalling my education as a young Nêhiyaw person again, it is necessary to remember that we do everything for a reason. This includes sharing the stories we choose to tell others. With that understanding, I recognized that whatever my collaborators chose to focus on was truly important to their story. In the end, I realize that the analysis of âcimowin within a Western academic context is necessary for completing my responsibilities to the institution as a student and I must recognize what is required of me having chosen to pursue this path.

Collaborator Selection Criteria

To be inclusive of Indigenous identities that lie outside of the governmental category of AI/AN, I extended my invitation to all faculty and staff who self-identify as Indigenous. Because a number of Indigenous groups are not classified as AI/AN, this decision was made to encompass the widest possible number of potential collaborators. However, I was aware that given the vibrant community of AI/AN students and professionals at MSU, most participants were bound to come from AI/AN backgrounds. When I began seeking out potential collaborators, MSU's Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report for AY 2020-2021 reported that there were 15 faculty and 50 staff who identified as AI/AN. This overall number has since risen to 20 faculty and 53 staff as of AY 2021-2022 (Montana State University, 2020; 2022). The AY 2020-2021AI/AN faculty and staff population provided a baseline for the pool of individuals that I hoped to work with, bearing in mind that some MSU employees work remotely or at extension offices across the state and may not be able to speak to specific experiences at the MSU-Bozeman campus. Given these factors, the true number of possible collaborators remains unknown. Due to the personal nature of this research, I sought to work with 10 Indigenous collaborators who were familiar with the cultural climate of MSU-Bozeman. My intentions with a small sample size were to continue to build relationships with fellow Indigenous professionals by allowing for longer conversations.

Inviting Collaborators to Participate

As I visited with my friends and colleagues at MSU about my research, I thought about the most appropriate way to extend an invitation for my Indigenous peers to participate in this work. Considering that many Indigenous professionals at our institution are routinely asked to

give their input on various projects, I was anxious to add yet another item to anyone's to-do list. Inviting collaborators to participate in a project that asks them to share experiences directly related to their indigeneity might also be considered a form of imposed cultural taxation regardless of my status as an Indigenous researcher (Walters et al., 2019). With this in mind, I worked to convey the relational nature of this project in my recruitment materials by intentionally refraining from language that suggests an extractive approach to research, such as referring to collaborators as "subjects." Instead, I created a flyer that invites Indigenous faculty and staff to "join me for an opportunity to share their stories," as opposed to framing their participation as singularly beneficial to me as the researcher (see Appendix D). This flyer was sent to individuals who are subscribed to the CAIP listserv, which includes a number of representatives from across campus who are involved with Indigenous programming at MSU. Distributing recruitment materials in this way allowed for sharing amongst various social networks within the university.

While I took great care to present this work transparently and respectfully in the recruitment flyer, the majority of collaborators agreed to participate during informal face-to-face conversations or via text message. I am fortunate to have close working relationships with many of my collaborators, which allowed for opportunities to describe my research over the course of several months prior to the interview process as we casually visited with each other. When employing Indigenous methodologies, Kovach (2021) calls this kind of sampling—where the researcher has a pre-existing relationship to their research participants— "relational sampling" (p. 169). The inherently relational nature of this process signifies reciprocity and ensures trust between the researcher and participants.

Of my collaborators, there were two individuals whom I had either not worked with directly or had met for the first time during the collaborator selection process. In these cases, I realized that my Indigenous identity alone might not be enough to establish immediate trust (Kovach, 2009; 2021). These individuals were contacted primarily via email rather than in person or through other informal means regarding their participation. As I corresponded with these collaborators, I was cognizant of their generosity to share time with me despite our new relationship and scheduled interviews based on their preferred availability rather than imposing my own personal schedule onto them.

Importance of Gift-giving

A common way to demonstrate relational accountability and respect for elders and knowledge keepers when approaching with a request is to present them with a gift (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). Gifts of tobacco and smudging herbs such as sweetgrass, sage, or cedar are traditionally associated with this practice. The presentation of a gift in exchange for knowledge signifies that the learner takes seriously cultural protocols and wishes to enter into a reciprocal relationship (Archibald, 2008, pp. 37-38). To ensure that my research process was consistent with traditional protocols, I presented each collaborator with a sage bundle tied in trade cloth as well as a $100.00 gift card at the time of each interview. As previously mentioned, such collaboration deserves respect demonstrated by traditional protocols that signify the gravity of such a request.

Collaborator Demographics

A total of 10 collaborators agreed to participate in this research with me. Five collaborators reported combined faculty-staff roles, while the remaining five reported staff-only

roles. At the time of the interview, one collaborator had recently left their position as a staff member. Two more collaborators have also left their positions as staff members since being interviewed. In all, seven collaborators are still MSU employees as of Fall semester of 2022. All but one collaborator identified as AI/AN, with the majority belonging to a tribal group categorized as American Indian. The last collaborator identified as an Indigenous person of North America, but due to the added level of discretion required for this research, their specific affiliation will remain confidential so as to avoid any speculation about this collaborator's identity.

Considering the challenges associated with protecting collaborator identities, I refrain from sharing any further demographic information. Because many Indigenous professionals at MSU are so well-known in their positions, reporting even so much as gender could be enough to implicate a collaborator's identity. This may seem like an exaggeration, but generally speaking most Indigenous professionals at our university know each other either personally or professionally and are also fairly visible within their respective departments given the relatively low numbers of Indigenous people employed by MSU. Discussing my research with one Indigenous faculty member, they said that despite the number of AI/AN faculty indicated in the Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report for AY 2020-2021, they could "count the number of Native faculty on one hand." Many other collaborators expressed the same belief—that the reported numbers of AI/AN faculty and staff may suggest one thing, but how can we really know how many of us are out there? We cannot rely on numbers alone to tell our stories (Walter & Andersen, 2013). Whether there are only a handful of Indigenous faculty and staff or even more

than our reports suggest, their stories must be amplified if we are to fulfill our responsibility as a land grant institution.

Barriers to a Relational Approach

A major barrier to employing a relational approach was the need to withhold so much tribally-specific information about the collaborators involved with this work. As a result, all collaborators are grouped together as singularly *Indigenous*, which may be confusing to a non-Indigenous audience and possibly offensive to an Indigenous audience. It is not my intention to sweep all of my collaborators into a homogenous group, yet it remains an unavoidable obstacle in order to protect their identities. Since Indigenous peoples—particularly American Indians—already experience imposed cultural homogenization by mainstream society, it is not productive to perpetuate discussions that represent their identities in a one-dimensional way. Within this group of 10 collaborators, 10 different Indigenous affiliations are present and reflected in the personal experiences of each individual. Notably, most collaborators refer to themselves as "Native" rather than Indigenous, but generally use both terms interchangeably when discussing their experiences. Although the majority of collaborators belong to tribes that are categorized as American Indian, not a single collaborator actually referred to them self as "American Indian" in any of the interviews. Of course, no two collaborators have the same experience and I have no intention of stating otherwise. Nonetheless, withholding a collaborator's tribal affiliation, gender, age, department, and position feels, to me, like a violation of my own axiological stance. However, I recognize why this is necessary from a logistical standpoint and hope that my collaborators and colleagues understand and forgive me for making this choice.

Because I am unable to share specific identifying markers that inevitably shape their stories, I instead share what I learned in aggregate. Sharing stories in aggregate separates the storyteller from their story and ultimately obscures the individual teachings that each storyteller offered. While direct quotes are shared later in this chapter, they are categorized by theme rather than by storyteller. Again, this is not an ideal way to pass along knowledge acquired through story because it removes a storyteller's words from their context (Adams et al., 2015). Often, when a knowledge keeper begins to tell a story they will start off by explaining who first told them the story and the specific context in which the storytelling took place (Adams et al., 2015; Archibald, 2008). While I am unable to share *who*, I can share that the majority of these conversations took place in American Indian Hall on the MSU-Bozeman campus—a space where Indigenous students, staff, faculty, and community members have come to recognize as a *home* away from *Home* (Joseph & Windchief, 2015).

Ê-âcimocik: Visiting as Storywork

Employing a storywork model, all interviews were treated as the personal and intellectual property of the collaborator. As a result, interview recordings were kept completely confidential and only shared between myself and each individual collaborator. Direct quotes were shared with collaborators for their approval for use in this research. Interview sessions ranged in time between 35 minutes and an hour and a half. While a list of predetermined questions was used as a reference to guide conversation, these questions were rarely posed verbatim, and some questions were not asked if the conversation ventured elsewhere (see Appendix B). General introductory questions were used to open each session and situate our conversation within the context of the collaborators' experiences at MSU. Because I was still in the process of building a

relationship with a few collaborators, I referenced my list of questions more closely during those interviews to continue the conversation and encourage further sharing. At times, those sessions more closely resembled standard interviews than storytelling sessions. As much as possible, I shared my own experiences to contextualize certain questions and create a space that encouraged storytelling.

Because *ê-âcimocik* means "they are visiting" or "they are telling stories," I thought about how each story was in conversation with the next and imagined that everyone involved was visiting with each other as I sat down and re-listened to the interview recordings. Within this group of collaborators, many mentioned that their support system consisted of other Indigenous faculty and staff at MSU and also referenced some of the same resources that encourage them to continue working at the university, including spaces such as American Indian Hall. It is important to reiterate that even though there are many similar experiences reported in this work, each collaborator has their own story and at times these stories are vastly different from one person to the next.

Making Relatives: Conversations with Collaborators

Collaborators were given the option to choose a pseudonym, but many did not have a preference in what they were called. Others were not as concerned with anonymity, and said that I could use their actual names if I so chose. However, it felt necessary to use a uniform way of addressing them because of the anxiety that some collaborators felt about sharing difficult stories related to their experiences. Because I felt that part of my responsibility was to make relatives with everyone involved, in my discussion I chose to refer to them as *wâhkômâkanak* (relatives) rather than assign a pseudonym that carries little purpose other than anonymity. As I report direct

quotes, I refer to collaborators individually as Wâhkômâkan (relative) 1-10, with numbers corresponding to the chronological order of each interview that took place. This approach allows for some individuation of those involved with this work. However, as previously mentioned, no identifying information is present in direct quotes. Finally, rather than translate major parts of their stories, I frequently use long quotations in order to keep a collaborator's words as true to the conversation as possible, redacting identifying information when necessary.

Making wâhkômâkanak is a process that takes time and intentional effort. As I worked with each collaborator, I understood that this process would extend far beyond the time it would take to complete this study. As a result, I understand that making relatives with collaborators is not an open-and-shut process that I could expect to have accomplished at the time of this writing. I am still making progress in this area, and realize that being a good relative is not something that someone can achieve and then set aside. It is an ongoing commitment that I hope to continue long after this study and beyond even then.

Before I proceed with sharing what I learned from my wâhkômâkanak at MSU, I feel it is appropriate to acknowledge that the lessons I share in the form of direct quotes are sacred in their own right. These are the stories of individuals who have worked extensively to support students, our university, their families, and their communities by way of their professional work. Although I am unable to acknowledge them by name in this document, I can only hope that they know how grateful I am to them for guiding me as a learner and professional. If I were able, I would write about each of them at great length, but for now I say kitatamihin for all they have given.

Findings and Discussion

Some of the most common themes across interviews were a commitment to students, the importance of community support, kinship systems, and the impact of emotional and cultural labor. The following discussion is organized into these four major themes that developed out of the interviews with individual responses organized according to their relation to each topic. Some themes resonated more with a given collaborator, and as a result the responses of certain collaborators may appear more frequently than others. It is also essential to acknowledge that while the following themes were the most prominent, for some collaborators these themes were not as relevant to their experiences or roles. I try my best to note when responses greatly differ, and acknowledge these instances in each section.

Theme I: Students

Across all interviews, “students” were mentioned 363 times, excluding my own responses. Students were reported to be the at the center of nearly every collaborator’s work. Many collaborators reported having close relationships to students that motivate them to continue working for the university. As Wâhkômâkan 1 stated, "...I've been entrusted to care for students. If I've ever felt a strong emotional or any kind of connection, it's always been to them." This feeling towards students was more common for collaborators who occupy direct-service roles, but was also evident in the responses of collaborators who divide their time between teaching and other administrative responsibilities, such as research and community-oriented initiatives. Wâhkômâkan 9 shared that even though their role was not specifically focused on serving Indigenous students, they “still feel this strong urge or responsibility to work more with Native students… and help them navigate the systems.” In addition to personal commitment,

several collaborators shared that being available to Indigenous students was the most important aspect of building relationships with them. When students have access to faculty and staff who show interest in their lives and invest in their success, those relationships can last beyond their time at the university. As Wâhkômâkan 1 aptly stated, “We have students that don't even go to MSU and they still stay in touch with us.”

In general, all collaborators mentioned that their departments tried to support Native students where they could, even if their office’s priorities lie elsewhere. Although Wâhkômâkan 10 reported that they personally do not see many students face-to-face, they acknowledged how important it is that Indigenous students have a point of contact that understands the challenges they face navigating the university setting:

> When they come in, they feel a loss or they kind of feel voiceless because they don't have that representation. And for me, being there to connect with them and to understand what they're going through is showing my bosses how to interact with our people, and how to guide them and just kind of be more open and respectful and not treat them just like a nuisance or something.

Regardless of their position or proximity to students, collaborators in more administrative roles still mentioned that serving Indigenous students in some way was a personal priority to them.

All collaborators also recognized that working with Indigenous students requires a level of cultural awareness that many non-Indigenous faculty and staff must come to understand in order to adequately and appropriately support them. Aside from their administrative duties, Wâhkômâkan 6 noted that a huge part of their job involves “speaking up for those people who are obviously making a huge sacrifice to just come here.” Student advocacy was reported to be a large part of many collaborators’ roles, even if this aspect is not a formal duty associated with their position. It was also noted that many Indigenous students coming to the university are non-traditional students with families who are navigating numerous obstacles while simultaneously

attending classes. Often, the sacrifices these students make go unnoticed because attending college is generally seen as a positive opportunity. While college is an exciting and commendable choice, there are costs beyond things like text books and tuition that these students must consider when they choose to attend a university.

Recalling their own experiences as students, many collaborators felt that supporting Indigenous students was their way of giving back. Several collaborators realized that their employment at the university made them a role model for younger generations. Wâhkômâkan 9 described how their position allowed them to follow such a path:

> As far as transitioning from being a student to being back at the university, I actually really enjoyed that. Having had experience off campus and then returning in a professional environment, kind of let me know how much I actually like the higher ed environment and like being around students, and hopefully, being a positive or inspiring person for the next generation.

Although the majority of collaborators were excited about the opportunity to give back by supporting Indigenous students, several of them reflected on how incredibly challenging it was coming from a tribal community to the university in the first place. Wâhkômâkanak 6 and 7 were interviewed together and shared many stories about their experiences as undergraduate students. In Wâhkômâkan 6's words:

> There was multiple challenges and multiple, multiple mental challenges that you have to just overcome...But when college or higher education makes you question yourself, and your mental abilities, then you know, it's hard. And so, we walked this path, and sometimes we crawled this path. And sometimes we sat down on the path. And sometimes we were like, cussing the path. But we did it. And every single day that I help at least one student get over some little bump in their goals for their educational path…It just, it's what we're meant to do. We're just meant to give back...We're not meant to stand here and say, 'Look at me, I did this,' we're meant to say, 'Look, you can do this, too.'

Wâhkômâkan 7 agreed that the transition from their home community to the university required a lot of focus and hard work to stay motivated to finish college. Together, Wâhkômâkanak 6 and

7 were able to support each other as partners and encouraged each other to keep going despite several obstacles. In addition to their own experience, Wâhkômâkan 7 also explained how difficult it is for Indigenous students to leave home in general:

> We fought and clawed our way all the way through. And it took us a little longer than we thought, but that's just the way it happened. And I think knowing that battle that it takes to leave home and come to a university or to college, it's a completely different world. And people just don't understand that coming from a reservation to a university takes so much courage. And for most people, they're the first of their family to do it.

In addition to the challenge of leaving home for an unknown environment, Wâhkômâkan 1 pointed out that it can be difficult to describe to family what it is like to be a college student. Wâhkômâkan 1 shared that there is a disconnection that can be felt between students and their families after they become college students, especially for those who are considered "first-generation." Wâhkômâkan 1 described how they went about explaining their experiences to family:

> Being a first-gen student, I often didn't know how to articulate my experience being a university student to my family…I would talk about the people, about the people who I worked with… Sometimes I think that's what my family, that's what people who were witnessing my journey, were able to hold from my college experience. Because I never talked about things I was learning in a classroom. I don't think they would have much interest in that.

The choice to attend college is often posed as an opportunity for Indigenous students to uplift their communities, but this choice also requires that they learn to adjust to an environment that is highly individualistic. As Wâhkômâkan 1 explained, certain parts of their story were just less relevant to their family; however, they took great interest in stories about Wâhkômâkan 1's relationships. This does not necessarily mean that academics are not of high importance to the families of first-generation students. Rather, Wâhkômâkan 1's experience suggests that certain

aspects of the college experience may be more accessible and culturally relevant to their families than others.

Finally, a theme that emerged from these conversations was that interaction with students can energize Indigenous faculty and staff. Wâhkômâkan 9 reflected that having an opportunity to interact with Indigenous students and staff enriched their experience working at the university. Wâhkômâkan 9 stated, “I didn't really realize how much I needed to be around other Native students or other Native people. Also, I hired my first Native work study. And I didn't realize how much I needed that.” Several collaborators mentioned that the familial nature of working with other Indigenous people made them feel at ease. Spending time with Indigenous students was also noted as a kind of reprieve from the demands of a heavy workload. When asked what they do to keep from burning out, Wâhkômâkan 5 stated:

> I think that it's really the students for me...Even just having my students come in my office needing a safe place to talk about something that's going on in their lives. To be able to connect like that—that's the light for me.

Eight of the 10 collaborators told stories about how rewarding it is to serve Indigenous students. Based on the stories shared with me, it seems that being able to connect on both personal and cultural levels provides a source of mutual, reciprocal support for both Indigenous students and faculty or staff. A few collaborators also pointed out that the relationships they made at MSU influenced their decision to stay at the university when other employment opportunities became available.

Theme II: Community Support

A question posed to all collaborators was whether they receive any kind of culturally-oriented support from the university to help assist them in their role. All 10 collaborators shared

that they had not received such support. As a follow-up to this question, collaborators were also asked if they feel like they belong to any kind of community as university employees. This question produced a mix of answers. Upon reflecting on this question, Wâhkômâkan 1 stated:

> Now that I'm thinking about it, I really don't know if I've ever really felt a part of one particular community…I don't. Really, you know, I'm a public servant, providing a public service… The students—that's who I belong to. And I've always tried to stay true to that...but professional-wise, I don't know. I don't know if I've ever really gotten close to anyone. I don't know if I was intentional with that."

Other collaborators also reported few opportunities to regularly connect with peers across the university. Wâhkômâkan 4 described that: “I don't feel like we have a strong enough community. I feel like we have glimpses of it.” Across interviews, collaborators mentioned that working on projects that prioritize Indigenous students or communities lends a sense of support, but it was also noted that additional Indigenous-centered professional development opportunities and social events are needed to build a stronger sense of community for Indigenous faculty and staff.

Another issue that Wâhkômâkan 9 described was the lack of Indigenous representation in professional development workshops. They shared:

> I have been involved with Leadership MSU…but even in those spaces, being the only Native person in those is weird. I feel like the problems that they [non-Indigenous peers] experience are so different from the problems that I'm experiencing and…I just don't feel like they could fully understand why it’s so challenging… I just feel that a lot of my support has come from my graduate student experience, and not so much directly from the university.

Leadership development workshops and seminars were generally described as “isolating” spaces where few people of color are present, let alone Indigenous people. Wâhkômâkan 3 shared that there were few meetings or other professional settings where they were actually invited to speak out about their experiences, making it difficult to believe that other people of color are being heard in these spaces as well. As far as resources are concerned, Wâhkômâkan 2 and

Wâhkômâkan 3 both noted that other Indigenous faculty and staff or other staff of color in their departments are their main source of support. As Wâhkômâkan 3 recalled, “I feel that for the most part, my experience has just been talking to other [people], like talking to you or talking to other staff of color, and then finding our own resources.” Elaborating on a similar experience, Wâhkômâkan 2 shared their perspective on receiving support for their role:

> Most of the support I received as a staff member is from other members of staff and faculty within my own department. So, there's certainly not anyone that I go to outside of here for help or support…You know, compared to other universities that don't have Native people, it's better than that.

From another perspective, Wâhkômâkan 10 saw the opportunity to work with Indigenous students as a source of support for their work. In their view, working with these students is a way to culturally connect while performing their duties. However, Wâhkômâkan 10 also reported that no other Indigenous-centered resources or opportunities were offered for their support:

> Just the opportunity to work with my fellow Native students, or the future students coming in now, being able to process their paperwork and being offered that, maybe, but nothing really ‘Indigenous-wise’ has been really shown [to me].

While a number of collaborators occupy positions that allow them to work with Indigenous students on a regular basis, those in positions that do not specifically prioritize Indigenous-centered services, programming, or education mentioned that getting involved with Indigenous-oriented initiatives on campus allows them to make connections with their Indigenous peers. For these collaborators, even small opportunities like attending meetings alongside their peers can help them feel more relaxed and welcomed during professional engagements.

As previously described, many collaborators discussed at length the obstacles they faced while transitioning into the university environment as students. These discussions centered on connections to tribal communities and homelands and the gradual process of becoming more

comfortable in an urban university setting. To this end, collaborators discussed how their cultural identities inform how they navigate their roles within the university. This introduced a concept that Wâhkômâkan 5 called "identity work." They mentioned that, "…next to knowledge acquisition, the greatest work that's done is identity work here at MSU. And all our students and faculty…are still doing identity work." Identity work can be seen in many different contexts. Sometimes, identity work is understood as the labor related to reconnecting with our Indigenous selves. This might involve learning or re-learning our tribal languages or working with elders. Within the context of this research, "identity work" might be associated with working through the specific challenges that come with "fitting in" at a PWI as a person of color. For Wâhkômâkan 3, their identity work involved trying to find a comfortable balance when working with non-Indigenous colleagues on certain projects. Wâhkômâkan 3 explained, "My experience has been either people completely ignore me, or people try to overextend and be too friendly, too nice, and over-include me in a way that like makes me feel spotlighted." Being the only Indigenous person in a professional setting was mentioned several times by collaborators as very uncomfortable. As Wâhkômâkan 3 described, at times this can mean being excluded from the discussion at hand or being subjected to unwanted attention.

Wâhkômâkan 4 also noted that the university setting can be isolating for Indigenous professionals, especially those who come from reservations. Wâhkômâkan 4 described:

> For a lot of us who come from reservation communities, 17,000 is a huge number [of students], right? But, I think, again, we can still feel isolated. I still feel isolated. When I first started at MSU, I had no idea what it would feel like to walk into some of these meetings and just not say a word. And then at some point, I think I kind of just learned to be like, okay, if something doesn't feel right, you need to say something, because if you don't, nobody else will.

Wâhkômâkan 4's willingness to speak out on their own behalf is a skill that requires much confidence for Indigenous professionals in non-Indigenous spaces. Several collaborators admitted they that were not comfortable bringing up identity issues in professional settings because they did not want others to misinterpret their concerns. Namely, they mentioned not wanting to "speak on behalf" of all Indigenous people, an issue that often arises out of being the only Indigenous person present in a given setting.

Multiple times, collaborators pointed out that they wanted to avoid being "tokenized" by standing in as a representative of their tribe or of Indigenous people in general. An aspect of diversity and inclusion work that can be problematic is when Indigenous inclusion crosses over into tokenizing, similar to the experience that Wâhkômâkan 3 previously described. Wâhkômâkan 5 elaborated on this issue:

> One of the things that I don't love right now is that there is this mandate for diversity, equity, and inclusion. It backfires when all these departments are trying to figure out how do it. They are scrambling to fulfill a mandate and sometimes they will come to you as an Indigenous person, hoping you can cover that base for them. It's often more than I can do and I can't represent for all things Indigenous. This situation can feel tokenizing. Sometimes Indigeneity is also added to an event to diversify the agenda, then Indigeneity can feel like it is part of the entertainment. I think that, in some ways, those diversity, equity, inclusion pieces come down as a box-checking thing that nobody knows what to do with and there just simply are not enough of us on campus to cover the demand.

Several collaborators mentioned how sharing aspects of their identity in a professional context can encourage a sense of connection, especially when it can benefit other Indigenous professionals, students, or communities. However, not all collaborators were interested in taking on this type of work. Just as Wâhkômâkan 5 mentioned, Wâhkômâkan 10 was also concerned with their identity only being used to meet DEI standards. For Wâhkômâkan 10, this was a responsibility that they did not want. They stated:

> I've always been careful, because I never wanted to be taken advantage of. I didn't want to be that token Indian…And it's just been important for me to always tell people that I don't represent all Natives. I only represent my view. And a lot of times people will be surprised when I tell them this is just my view…So I can't speak for everybody, and I never want to be in that position.

Generally speaking, collaborators described that it can be hard to determine where to draw the line when sharing information about their cultural identity in a professional setting. A number of collaborators stated that non-Indigenous people can overstep by asking inappropriate questions, even if they mean well. Wâhkômâkan 2 noted that this issue particularly came up in their work around Indigenous holidays or celebrations. They explained that "you definitely can feel that relationship change when it's Indigenous Peoples' Day, or when it's American Indian Heritage Month, because…the questions start rolling in." For collaborators in direct-service roles, they reported that identity-driven work occupied a large portion of their time simply because they were called on to answer so many questions from community members pertaining to Indigenous cultures.

However, other collaborators mentioned that their identity had very little to do with their work, and as a result their identity as an Indigenous person did not significantly influence their professional experiences at MSU. In Wâhkômâkan 8's experience, they were rarely called upon to talk about their cultural background in any professional context. Wâhkômâkan 8 also shared that their work does not routinely involve discussions on identity, stating "I guess I could say…a Native person doesn't have to do my role." They went on to explain that because their role does not require them to provide cultural education or consulting, their identity as an Indigenous person is not regarded as a relevant aspect of their work. Wâhkômâkan 8 further described that, at most, their supervisor occasionally "asks for a little feedback on…my view as a Native person" during meetings or projects that involve Indigenous people in some manner.

Wâhkômâkan 8's experience serves as a reminder that even though many Indigenous professionals at MSU do regularly participate in culturally-oriented work, there are still others whose identities are not at the forefront of their professional lives.

Whether or not their identities play a significant role in their work-related responsibilities, collaborators generally felt that a connection to community can offer tremendous support for Indigenous faculty and staff. However, with community and cultural connection comes the risk of being implicated to speak on behalf of other Indigenous people. About half of the collaborators noted that the more they became recognized in their roles for their cultural identity, the more susceptible they were to be invited to take on additional projects based on their indigeneity. Many collaborators recognize this as a "good problem to have," yet more Indigenous faculty and staff are needed to share the wealth of such responsibilities. Regardless of how much their indigeneity plays a role in their professional duties, having a culturally-sensitive support system is essential to boost morale for the majority of collaborators. Wâhkômâkan 5 stated, "…we're all coming home, one way or another." These words linger as a gentle lesson for all of us—no matter where we are in our identity work journeys, we are all making our way back *Home* (Joseph & Windchief, 2015). Within the university, this often means we are trying our best to cultivate a strong community for ourselves and those we care about.

Theme III: Kinship

Indigenous kinship systems were identified as one cultural aspect that many collaborators felt were misunderstood by non-Indigenous people. In relation to kinship, every collaborator mentioned that the loss of family members was a common experience for Indigenous students, staff, and faculty. Many times, collaborators used funerary practices as an example of the

cultural traditions that involve extended family. Wâhkômâkan 2 explained what the process of educating non-Indigenous faculty about extended family is like:

> It's like a kinship lesson. Let's talk about kinship. Let's talk about why you have a Native student that had four family members die this year. We can talk about why that happened... because families in Native cultures are extended. They're not just a nuclear family of four people.

Wâhkômâkan 7 further described how extended family plays a role in the lives of Indigenous people. They offered the following advice to those who are unfamiliar with such family structures, especially non-Indigenous professionals who work with Indigenous students:

> Try to understand. If you don't understand that's fine. Ask questions. It's okay to ask questions…but MSU and professors, they don't understand how big your family is. So, say a student loses someone, a cousin or an aunt. And, the syllabus or the university code of conduct or some policy says you shouldn't be allowed the absence because it's not a direct family member. But what they don't understand is that you grew up with these cousins, like they're your brothers and sisters, and that your aunt is like your second mother. And you have big families and our ways of mourning or funerals, they take a week. It's not just a showing on one day and that's it. It's a funeral, so a week long, and you have big families that you grew up with, and it's a different family structure. And so, you need to try to learn the culture. And when you don't know, ask questions and be open to the answers you get. They're not always going to be the ones you like, but that's just the way it is.

Wâhkômâkan 9 also shared that cultural and ceremonial absences from work or school are generally misunderstood by non-Indigenous professionals. Wâhkômâkan 9 described an occasion where they took leave for a ceremony for several days, and felt that their non-Indigenous coworkers did not understand why something like a ceremony required so much time away from work. When asked what they suggest non-Indigenous leadership can do to help their employees better understand Indigenous kinship and culture, Wâhkômâkan 9 offered that directors and supervisors should try to understand some of the specific challenges that their Indigenous staff face, and should educate their non-Indigenous staff about the importance of cultural connection.

Another way that kinship plays a role in the professional lives of Indigenous faculty and staff is through relationships with students and peers. As mentioned in previous sections, establishing relationships with other Indigenous people provides a supportive and comforting environment for Indigenous faculty and staff. Furthermore, these close relationships can positively affect student outcomes and improve student retention (Carjuzaa et al., 2019). Wâhkômâkan 1 reflected that, "…there's a push, or there is kind of a recognition, that it really is like a kinship type relationship" between Indigenous students, staff, and faculty. As Joseph and Windchief (2015) explain, support for Indigenous students "…happens through the construction of family relationships in the educational context" (p. 93). Although Joseph and Windchief (2015) refer to student-to-student connections when it comes to family-like relationships, students also form these bonds with faculty and staff.

HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) explain that the FEM encourages "an environment that honors and includes the extended family and nurtures appropriate partnerships" between students and a higher education institution (p. 30). Because the majority of collaborators in the current study closely align themselves with students, it may be appropriate to infer that the FEM also applies to Indigenous faculty and staff experiences. To illustrate how current Indigenous professionals at MSU model their work after their mentors, Wâhkômâkan 1 shared a story about an influential staff member that they grew close to as a student whose departure from the university deeply impacted them. Wâhkômâkan 1 reflected:

> It bothered the students, because he had meant so much to us. And he was so…formative. Not just in the capacity of an educator, but also in a kinship way. I remember that was hard…I think in the time that I've worked here, I think we've worked really hard to establish that kind of culture.

Many collaborators shared that they see something of themselves in the students that they work with. Because they had to work through similar challenges as students, most collaborators considered themselves as responsible for providing a kinship-like support system for students. Just as Wâhkômâkan 1 shared, cultivating an environment where students are sincerely connected to faculty and staff establishes a culture of relationality. Moreover, these relationships are not one-sided. That is, Indigenous faculty and staff do not go through the process of building trust with students for the singular purpose of making students feel comfortable. Faculty and staff experiences are also enriched by these relationships. Providing an astute example of this connection to students, Wâhkômâkan 5 stated, "I feel like they're all my kids."

Stemming from their extended families, another aspect of kinship that collaborators mentioned was the structure of Indigenous families. As told by several collaborators, Indigenous households tend to be multigenerational. As a result, the nuclear family structure mentioned by Wâhkômâkan 2 is much less prevalent. In particular, Wâhkômâkan 9 had much to share about their family dynamic and how it influenced their experiences:

> The challenging part was, as a Native person, I grew up kind of in a broken family dynamic. So, they never really taught us traditional roles…I know some bits and pieces, but my parents never taught me much. It was mostly my grandma. But my grandma was also limited in how much time we spent together. So, [I'm] kind of regaining that and relearning that at an older age, but I think it's good…it's good experience.

As described by Wâhkômâkan 9, being raised by grandparents is quite common in Indigenous communities. Although there are challenges associated with this structure, this type of family dynamic can create strong bonds across multiple generations and instill an added level of respect for elders. Furthermore, while Wâhkômâkan 9 described that their family background was at times difficult to reconcile, they also mentioned that they later realized it was "good experience"

because it allowed them to understand the particular challenges experienced by students from similar backgrounds.

On another note, Wâhkômâkan 10 described that having witnessed a lack of job security in their community growing up, working at the university provided stable employment so that they could support their family. Aside from wanting to give back to their communities and support Indigenous students, a few collaborators mentioned how working at the university provided them with benefits such as paid leave, retirement plans, and health insurance that can help them support their families. When asked what motivated them to work at MSU, Wâhkômâkan 10 shared:

> Just the stability of the job, job security. And then maybe if there's an opportunity to work my way up or get promotions, and maybe kind of see if I can branch out to some other department at some time… but mainly, just looking back on job stability. Because I never really had that growing up…So, that's something I wanted to establish…for me and my little family.

It was mentioned several times that the cost of living in Bozeman imposed a number of challenges for collaborators with families. However, working at the university provided a way for these collaborators to access resources that they otherwise would not have learned about outside of the university environment, such as affordable housing options. Three collaborators also noted that working at the university was their first time receiving employment benefits. One collaborator stated that this finally allowed them the option to receive health care treatments they previously could not afford.

Overall, maintaining a connection to family and being able to support family—whether biological or not—was reported to be of great importance to all collaborators. Although there is work left to do to educate non-Indigenous colleagues about Indigenous kinship systems, the university environment also equips Indigenous professionals with resources that other places of

employment in Bozeman may not offer. For as many challenges as there are to maintain a connection to extended family and ceremony while living and working in an urban setting, the opportunity to work alongside other Indigenous people at MSU provides a sense of kinship that many collaborators note as their favorite aspect of their job.

Theme IV: Emotional/Cultural Labor

However arduous the "hidden contributions" (Steinman & Scoggins, 2020) associated with their roles, such as participating in diversity workshops, answering numerous phone calls regarding land acknowledgments, explaining "Indian names," advising community members on reconnecting to their Indigenous ancestry, helping students move into new apartments, providing crisis counseling, giving educational presentations and much more, the Indigenous professionals at MSU who perform these tasks are undoubtedly committed to providing a high level of care to our urban Indigenous community. Truly, their work is done with love. The discussion that follows in the final section of this chapter exposes the more challenging aspects of this work. I present this part of my collaborators' stories not to simply critique the institution, but to acknowledge the extent to which they *give* to this university.

With the exception of one collaborator, everyone had something to say about the emotional and cultural labor involved with being an Indigenous professional at a PWI. Overall, it was shared that just being an Indigenous person carries with it the imposed expectation of educating non-Indigenous people about cultural norms and practices of any given tribal community. Since being asked to educate others can quickly become tokenizing, the emotional and cultural labor associated with this task is commonly noted as a significant source of work-related stress for Indigenous professionals (Walters et al., 2019). In describing their experience,

Wâhkômâkan 1 stated outright, “This job requires everything of us—mentally, emotionally, spiritually.” Despite how harrowing this statement may seem, collaborators generally reported that they enjoy their work. Yet, there are aspects of their roles that weigh more heavily than others, and the sheer volume of requests for cultural education are understandably overwhelming.

Noted in previous sections, being asked to represent an Indigenous perspective in any context may seem inclusive, but it is also problematic in its assumption that a single Indigenous person can speak on behalf of all others. Of course, it is encouraging that Indigenous representation is becoming more common in predominantly White settings. However, many collaborators reported that they are often called on not to contribute their individual skills or ideas, but rather to represent their racial background. Wâhkômâkan 3 mentioned that they were routinely given any task involving an Indigenous student. While they were fine with this, it was also concerning to them that non-Indigenous colleagues did not take the time to try to work with Indigenous students on their own. Wâhkômâkan 3 shared, “Sometimes I'll notice extra stuff, extra tasks and things—especially if they're related to Indigenous students—fall on me when it genuinely could have gone to anyone.” Because Indigenous professionals are assumed to be experts on indigeneity, they often receive these additional tasks on top of their regular duties. If non-Indigenous colleagues pass off Indigenous-associated tasks, they miss out on opportunities to gain cultural competency and learn how to appropriately support Indigenous students.

Wâhkômâkan 2 reported similar experiences, stating, “I'd say there's a very odd expectation that for any and all things Native, they come to us.” Although Wâhkômâkan 2’s role did not formally require them to perform community outreach, they described that responding to

community inquiries took up a significant amount of their time. They also shared that, at times, handling such requests consumed more of their time than performing tasks that were actually required of their position. Wâhkômâkan 2 shared that, “It's kind of this weird place where people want our community to educate them free of charge and that the opportunity to educate them is the payment.” Regardless of payment, the expectation that Indigenous people should be willing and ready to accommodate each and every request they receive to educate others is troubling, yet it is a reality for many of the Indigenous professionals at MSU.

Wâhkômâkan 2 further reflected that they received numerous requests that, from their perspective, might be considered “not only ridiculous, but offensive.” These types of requests ranged from being asked to find a healer to bless a haunted house, gathering a group of dancers to perform on a private ranch for a party, tracing someone’s ancestry to see if they were Native American or not, and even the request to speak to an “authentic Indian.” On the surface, these inquiries may seem like pranks or jokes, but the volume of similar inquiries received by a number of collaborators in this study suggests that these are not isolated incidents. Upon reflection, several collaborators wondered whether other professionals of color at the university receive similar inquiries. While non-Indigenous professionals may not see an issue with some of these inquiries, to an Indigenous person these requests can be both distracting and harmful. Although most of the time collaborators shared that they do not believe anyone is trying to be expressly offensive when asking such questions, they also shared that there is little protection in place by the institution to prevent these types of interactions from happening.

Of course, several collaborators stated that they would like to be able to assist with educating the community as a way to mitigate harmful assumptions from happening in the first

place. However, due to a number of competing priorities, being able to commit to community awareness projects such as trainings and workshops is simply not feasible to many Indigenous professionals. Wâhkômâkan 4 described how much additional work it would take to assist with training projects:

> I have not physically and purposefully started any trainings. Because that could be a full-time job. And that would take focus off students and having our door open…So I've never really intentionally started any training programs on how to support Native students for faculty or staff or community members, primarily, because…I just don't want that to take over my primary job supporting students.

Taking on even more community-oriented obligations can be a kind of double-edged sword for many Indigenous professionals. On one level, their assistance with educational initiatives can increase Indigenous visibility on campus and beyond. However, this also puts them at risk of spreading themselves thinly across several different projects and can impede their ability to complete their own duties. Wâhkômâkan 5 further added that requests for their assistance come "not just from the university, but also from the community and other organizations." The added pressure to educate the wider Gallatin Valley community can put a strain on MSU-affiliated employees who are accountable firstly to the university. Wâhkômâkan 5 suggested that it could be beneficial for Indigenous professionals at MSU to come to together and "collectively...say, 'I'm sorry, I hope you can understand. There's just not enough of us right now to do this work.'"

For Indigenous professionals who work in areas of the university that lack diversity, voicing this issue can be more challenging—especially if no one else in their department is willing or able to assist with culturally-oriented tasks. Wâhkômâkan 7 described how they were the only person of color in their department—a trend that they reported was common for their particular unit of the university. They reported that there was little effort to accommodate cultural practices of not only Indigenous students, but students of other backgrounds as well.

Wâhkômâkan 7 then decided to take on the responsibility of educating non-Indigenous colleagues about specific cultural practices shared by Indigenous students and even began offering programming that catered to Indigenous and BIPOC students and their families. Having recently left their position, Wâhkômâkan 7 was not sure whether those efforts were kept up by their colleagues.

Wâhkômâkan 9 described a similar experience, but instead of supporting students they reported that they were tasked with supporting other staff. To describe the role they began to play in their particular department, Wâhkômâkan 9 shared:

> I felt like I became the office counselor, or the office mom…I don't feel like a lot of it was reciprocated. I went through challenges, too. And I don't know if they really thought about how it felt for me to be navigating in these spaces and not really feeling like it's inclusive to me, or that because I can fit in so well that I don't have any of those problems.

Handling their colleagues' challenges on top of their own can create an additional emotional burden for Indigenous professionals. "Fitting in" in non-Indigenous spaces may give the impression to colleagues and supervisors that an Indigenous professional is entirely comfortable with their positionality within the university. However, as Wâhkômâkan 9 stated, at times they "had to work twice as hard" to prove that they belonged in their role in the first place.

From another angle, many Indigenous faculty and staff members put in special effort to ensure the students they work with are holistically supported. With this priority comes a significant amount of emotional labor. This can often mean working late hours and weekends to support both students and the extended Indigenous community of the Gallatin Valley area. While these extra tasks are not required of them, they often take on these additional duties because of the kinship-like relationships they hold. Wâhkômâkan 2 described their additional

responsibilities as “community expectations.” In their experience, being available to students and Indigenous community members was generally an expectation that came with their work:

> It's like the unwritten rule. I believe that being present is really important, and just being someone that people feel comfortable talking to. Unfortunately, what that entails is that you're also kind of on a crisis response team, voluntarily.

While this expectation may seem burdensome, several collaborators noted that they are more than willing to put in the time and energy it takes to ensure that students and other Indigenous community members are safe, socially supported, and academically successful. Explaining their reasoning for such commitment, Wâhkômâkan 1 shared:

> I try to create a safe space, because I understand that a lot of our campus partners don't have direct experience like we do. We've got some heavy stuff. Every Child Matters. Missing and Murdered Indigenous People. Stuff like that. I mean, it's stuff you don't want to mess with. And so as is, I think the one skill that we've tried to show and model to our non-Indigenous and non-tribal colleagues is that we're very collaborative across generations. I think I've tried to invite elder participation; we're trying to bring in the youth, our students, to really hone their point of view.

Although the extra labor involved with caring for Indigenous students, educating the community, and pitching in on DEI work is tiring and often uncompensated, the majority of collaborators shared that receiving awards, additional payment, or adding a line to their resume are not reasons why they take on additional efforts. Overall, most collaborators reflected that they put in the extra effort in order to maintain their relationships to students, other staff, and the wider Indigenous community. That said, Wâhkômâkan 4 also noted that carrying a heavy workload also requires taking time to practice self-care to avoid burning out. They noted:

> I think self-care… almost should be built into our ‘duties as assigned.’…[Y]ou need to take time off and spend time with your family or, you know, take a hike and go out and do what you need to do.

Because this work can easily bleed into other aspects of their lives, several collaborators mentioned that they have to remember to conserve energy for themselves outside of work and

put into perspective why they are so busy in the first place. From Wâhkômâkan 2's viewpoint, this means "reminding myself pretty regularly that it's a job…and I have to keep that in mind all the time."

Considering the low number of Indigenous professionals working at the university, it is concerning to realize just how many additional duties they take on as a result of their identity alone. If the Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report for AY 2021-2022 is accurate in its reported number of AI/AN faculty and staff at MSU, collaborators participating in this study represent approximately 11% of this population. Although a few collaborators have since left their positions at the time of this writing, it is important that their stories are shared so that we might learn what specific challenges others may encounter in their professional lives. Of course, despite their participation in this study, collaborators involved with this work do not represent all Indigenous faculty and staff at MSU. There are still many other Indigenous professionals not represented in this chapter who have stories of their own, which may or may not be similar to those described here.

CHAPTER FIVE

MÊKINAWÊWIN*:* GIVEAWAY

Story as Gift-giving

I return your words, thanking

you for loaning them to me.

Thank you, my Cree friends, all my friends,

may we speak again.

kâwi kimiyitinâwâw kititwêwiniwâwa.

kinanâskomitinâwâw ê-awihiyêk.

ah-hay, nitôtêmitik Nêhiyawak, kahkiyaw nitôtêmitik,

kîhtwâm ka-pîkiskwâtitonaw.

—Naomi McIlwraith, "ninitâhtâmon kititwêwiniwâwa – I Borrow Your Words"

In her closing of *Indigenous Storywork*, Archibald (2008) uses the metaphor of a "storybasket" to illustrate how her storywork research functions as a kind of vessel that reflects what she learned working relationally with elders. She also mentions how she intends to pass on her storybasket as a gift, stating, "In Stó:lō tradition a basket maker gives her first basket away to someone who may find it useful. I give this storywork basket to you" (Archibald, 2008, p. 153). Similar to Absolon's (2010) notion of a knowledge bundle, Archibald (2008) describes a storybasket as both a representation of one's learning process and a container that holds the teachings we carry with us over time. Both storybaskets and knowledge bundles reflect the

ceremonial nature of relational research, especially through the transmission of knowledge from one person to the next. Although storybaskets or knowledge bundles might be thought of as personal belongings, by design there are teachings held within these vessels that are meant to be passed on. In this respect, lessons contained within our storybaskets/knowledge bundles should be considered communal goods. Indeed, we keep the teachings we learn with us, but they do not really belong to us as personal property. Reflecting on my own story basket or knowledge bundle as represented by this document, I intend to share what I learned throughout this process as a gift to whomever may encounter it so that we might continue to pass on these lessons in a good way.

To speak to the importance of communally sharing knowledge during the dissemination process, Kovach (2021) states, “Returning knowledge to the community is consistent with the ethos of reciprocity in Indigenous methodologies” (p. 241). Often, it is easy to use this stage of research to highlight the personal accomplishments of the researcher or researchers. Thinking reciprocally, I instead think about sharing research as an opportunity for a community-wide celebration of collective accomplishment. In sharing this part of my experience, I do not have the authority to pass on the stories of my wâhkômâkanak as my own. Much of this work is theirs, not mine. That said, what I share here are the lessons that I personally gained by listening and learning from them. As an Indigenous researcher, I realize how sacred this process is and how I have been entrusted to ask questions, record stories, and present the experiences of others in good faith. I hope that what this research represents is *sâkihitowin* (love) for the Indigenous professionals who were kind enough to let me into their stories to listen and learn.

As demonstrated by Archibald (2008), another important aspect of Indigenous-centered research is modeling humility when presenting findings. She writes that *Indigenous Storywork* is

her first storybasket, and recognizes its imperfections and flaws (Archibald, 2008, p. 153). Over the course of my own research process, I was often reminded that there is so much about this academic field, my culture as a Nêhiyaw person, and relational research that I still do not know. I also continuously found new areas of my work that could be improved. Processing these realizations made for a truly humbling experience. Additionally, I observed that Western academic research is in and of itself an ego-driven endeavor, and that I must detangle myself from this colonized way of approaching research in order to work harmoniously with my collaborators, the institution, and my extended community of peers at MSU. Mentioned by several collaborators in this study, one of the obstacles to a relational approach that Indigenous professionals witness in higher education is the lust for accolades and personal recognition that seemingly permeates academia. There is no doubt that academia is a site where brilliant people thrive, and I do not mean to imply that academic achievement is not deserving of such recognition. Rather, I hope that higher education professionals consider that relationality cannot thrive when competition precedes collaboration.

As I close this research ceremony, I pass on these lessons with the trust that whatever is taken from this work to inform other research or institutional projects is done so with miyo-wîcêhtowin in mind. When we give a gift to someone, we can never truly know what will be done with it. Ultimately, this requires faith that our gifts have been received in a good way and will be used responsibly. As researchers, we may never know what will come of this succession of knowledge, but as Adams et al. (2015) share in their collaborative work *Ceremony at a Boundary Fire*: *A Story of Indigenist Knowledge*, “Knowledge has agency and can choose to reveal and also to protect itself” (p. 18). Therefore, in passing on our stories and experiences as

Indigenous people we accept that knowledge may or may not be gained depending on the listener's readiness to receive the lesson.

Give Away: Final Conclusions and Recommendations

MSU is set to follow "Choosing Promise" as its strategic plan through 2024 (Montana State University, 2019). As our institution gears up to reassess its priorities, perhaps Indigenous perspectives can begin to inform how we move forward with the planning process. I invite our university to imagine what our future may look like if Indigenous students, community members, and professionals are given the space to share in the planning process. If we hope to carry on the promise to champion underrepresented voices, we must utilize strategies that actually reflect who we serve. If we do not know how to utilize these strategies, we must be willing to learn how by listening to those who carry these knowledges.

Despite the disparity in numbers between White and ethnic minority professionals at MSU, there are several faculty and staff members who are committed to elevating the voices of underrepresented communities including Indigenous peoples. When it comes to institutional change, we simply cannot continue to operate under the status quo if we expect our goals to manifest. As our university grows, we become accountable to an ever-expanding community of students, faculty, and staff and are responsible for ensuring equitable experiences for all stakeholders.

Although there are sure to be challenges to indigenizing our university's administrative practices, we must make room for kinship and community in higher education to build and sustain genuine relationships with Indigenous communities. This process will take much time—more time than we typically budget for when creating project timelines. However, to continue to

overlook institutional challenges like those shared in this research is simply not an option. The weight of cultural and emotional labor reported by the majority of collaborators in this study should be considered a major concern. I present this call to action as an invitation to gather, to help each other, to make relatives, to honor the contributions of Indigenous professionals, and ultimately to embrace wâhkôhtowin as an institutional value. If we are committed to sustaining our success as a top-tier land-grant institution, we must prioritize the values of those communities who contribute to the quality scholarship, administrative operations, teaching, student service, and diversity that our university is known for.

As for recommendations for further work, collaborator responses revealed that Indigenous faculty and staff require increased opportunities for professional development, additional staff to assist with programmatic initiatives, further support for navigating the onboarding and benefits selection process, more options for networking and collaborating with Indigenous peers across departments, and a deeper understanding of Indigenous kinship and community needs by non-Indigenous peers. To accomplish all of this may seem an immense task, but if we work consistently, intentionally, and collaboratively there is no reason why this change should be impossible. Based on the responses of most collaborators, Indigenous professionals at MSU are committed to improving outcomes for their peers and students, but there is an urgent need for non-Indigenous allies to assist in the process.

While some Indigenous professionals have in fact reported the aforementioned equity gaps at our institution, our presence in this space is growing. For instance, the Diversity Reports for AY 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, reflected an increase in AI/AN faculty from 1.1 percent to 2 percent between the time of these reports (Montana State University, 2020; 2022). As small as

this increase may seem, it is one indication of a growing population of Indigenous professionals who choose to invest in MSU as their place of work. Additionally, recent efforts such as the College of Agriculture's Indigenous Pathways in Agriculture initiative and the Honor Bound program housed under the Honors College are two examples of Indigenous-centered programming that require additional culturally-competent staff to carry out operations. With new programs and partnerships aimed at Indigenous student success, our university must invest in more faculty and staff who are able to meet the needs of Indigenous students and communities. Make no mistake, the need for equitable treatment extends beyond Indigenous-specific programs as well. Indigenous professionals occupy positions all across the university, and while some hold positions unrelated to student services, their experiences matter just as much. I am not implying that our university is an inequitable place of work. What I mean by this sentiment is that we can do better by our Indigenous employees no matter their job titles by demonstrating values that support Indigenous identities and knowledges.

As reflected in the stories of my collaborators—my wâhkômâkanak—there are several Indigenous professionals at MSU who are already going above the call of duty to ensure that our university keeps its promises to Indigenous students and communities. In closing this research ceremony, I invite the rest of my peers at MSU to begin to do the same. If we are able to unify as an institution and recognize that we are all relations, and commit to an ethic of reciprocity modeled by numerous Indigenous communities, perhaps we can come closer to building and maintaining genuine relationships with all of our university's stakeholders.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR INVOLVEMENT IN HUMAN RESEARCH AT MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

You are being asked to participate in a research study titled *"Indigenous MSU: Understanding Lived Experiences of Indigenous Faculty & Staff."* This study is led by Kristie Russette, Department of Native American Studies at Montana State University. The purpose of this research is to highlight the experiences of Indigenous faculty and/or staff who are employed by MSU Bozeman. This research is intended to educate non-Indigenous faculty and staff about the specific challenges and triumphs that Indigenous professionals experience while working for a public university.

Your participation in this project is voluntary, and if you agree to participate you will be asked to discuss personal experiences about your relationship to Indigenous communities and your role at the university. You may ask questions at any time, decline to answer any questions, and may choose to withdraw from this study at any time. Depending on your responses, the interview may last between ½-hour to 1½ hours.

This study will be used to begin development for a future training workshop as well as for the investigator's master's thesis in Native American Studies. This study is funded by an MSU Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion grant within the College of Letters and Science (CLS) and aggregate findings will be reported to Dean Idzerda and the CLS DEI committee. In order to ensure that participant employment is not affected by participation in this study, raw data and/or direct quotes will be not shared in this report. Only cumulative data, including themes and a summary of findings will be used in the report to the CLS Dean and DEI committee. This measure is emphasized in order to prevent data from being linked back to participants.

There are no foreseen risks to participating in this study. All data associated with this study will be kept in encrypted electronic storage. Due to the personal nature of this topic, certain questions may be upsetting to you or relate to distressing situations. Should you recall any prior experiences relating to discrimination or harassment during your involvement with this study, you are encouraged to contact the MSU Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) at 406-994-2042 or oie@montana.edu.

The study is of no direct benefit to you; however, information from this study may benefit future Indigenous students, faculty, and staff at MSU, and may help educate non-Native faculty and staff about relevant issues affecting individuals at our university. If you choose to participate, you will be compensated for your time with a VISA gift card in the amount of $100.00.

Unless otherwise requested, participant identities will remain anonymous. If for any reason participants would prefer to disclose their identity, they are welcome to do so.

If you agree, this interview will be audio recorded. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded. Recordings will be transcribed and coded using pseudonyms to be chosen by the participants. Additionally, all participants will have access to the transcripts of their personal interview, and will have the final say in whether any direct quotes are used in the PI's master's thesis. If any quoted material is used for this purpose, the PI will remove or disguise any information that might be linked back to the participant's identity and will only be used if the participant agrees that it is appropriate.

Please contact me with any questions about the study at any time by emailing Kristie Russette at kristie.russette@montana.edu or by phone at 406-224-2862. For questions regarding the rights of research

participants, please contact Mark Quinn, Chair of the MSU Institutional Review Board, at 406-994-4707 or mquinn@montana.edu.

Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview audio recorded. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

☐ I do not want to have this interview recorded.
☐ I am willing to have this interview recorded:

Signed: _____
Date: _____

By signing below, I am confirming that I have read the above information, understand potential risks, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I agree to participate in this research, and understand that I may withdraw from this project at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

Participant signature_____ Date_____

Participant Name (printed)_____

Investigator_____ Date_____

Printed name of Investigator_____

APPENDIX B

APPROVED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT: Indigenous MSU: Understanding Lived Experiences of Indigenous Faculty & Staff

The following questions may be asked during personal interviews.

Self-location/Role at MSU

1. Please describe your role at MSU.
2. Length of time serving in your role at MSU?
3. Please describe your connection to Indigenous communities.
4. What is your educational background and did you attend MSU as a student at any level?

Community/Culture

1. Do you feel as though you are part of a community at MSU?
2. How would you describe the community(s) you belong to?
3. What elements of your community(s) do you see represented at MSU?
4. How do you see your work serving Indigenous communities? MSU?
5. How would describe Indigenous inclusion and representation at MSU?

Personal Experiences

1. Please describe a time that you were called on to offer your assistance to another person/department/event that was related to your identity as an Indigenous person.
2. How often do you work with Indigenous students in your role?
3. How often do you work with other Indigenous professionals in your role?
4. Have you ever been called on to speak on behalf of Indigenous peoples in your role?
5. What resources exist in your department that support Indigenous faculty and/or staff?
6. What would you like non-Native faculty and/or staff to understand about Indigenous professionals at MSU?
7. What recommendations do you have for our university for further supporting your work at MSU?

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL FORM

From: Beiswanger, Kelly
To: Russette, Kristie
Bcc: Beiswanger, Kelly
Subject: RE: Request for Exemption Application - Russette
Date: Tuesday, May 17, 2022 10:32:00 AM
Attachments: image001.png
Russette KR051722-EX.pdf

Dear Kristie,

Thank you for your application. This email acknowledges receipt of the request for IRB Review and serves as the Approval Letter for your research. Your new **IRB Exempt Protocol # is KR051722-EX**. Please find your approved/stamped Consent Form attached.

Study Title: **Indigenous MSU: Understanding Lived Experiences of Indigenous Faculty & Staff**

As the PI, it is your responsibility to facilitate subject understanding by informing subjects of all aspects of the project, providing an opportunity to ask questions, and describing risks and benefits of participation. Submit any new changes to the research protocol to the IRB via Amendment Form prior to implementing.

The research described in your submission is exempt from the requirement of additional review by the Institutional Review Board in accordance with 45 CFR 690.104(d). The specific paragraph which applies to your research is:

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

(ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by § 690.111(a)(7).

Thank you,
Kelly Beiswanger

IRB Administrator & Program Manager
Office of Research Compliance
Hamilton Hall 123
Montana State University
kelly.beiswanger@montana.edu
406-994-4706
https://www.montana.edu/orc/irb

From: Beiswanger, Kelly <kelly.beiswanger@montana.edu>

APPENDIX D

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE FLYER

You're Invited!

Tansi!

As part of my master's thesis for the Department of Native American Studies, and with support from the CLS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, I am inviting Indigenous faculty and staff members at MSU-Bozeman to join me for an opportunity to share personal stories about what it's like to be part of the MSU community.

My goal with this project is to honor and celebrate the contributions of Indigenous professionals at MSU and begin conversations about how non-Indigenous allies can better support Indigenous faculty and staff.

For this project, I hope to interview MSU faculty and/or staff members who self-identify as *Indigenous*. Interviews are expected to take between 30 minutes to 1.5 hours and will be conducted over the summer, between June-July 2022. Only aggregate findings will be reported to the CLS DEI Committee. Participants will remain anonymous and any personally identifiable information will be removed or disguised to protect participant identities. Quoted material may be used in my thesis, but any infomation that might be linked to participant identities will not be disclosed.

In exchange for sharing their stories, I am offering $100 VISA gift cards to all participants. If you or someone you know may be interested in participating, or more additional information, please contact Kristie Russette for more information.

With questions or concerns about this study, please contact Kristie Russette or the MSU Institutional Review Board at irb@montana.edu or 406-994-4706.

Contact info: Kristie Russette
kristie.russette@gmail.com
(406) 224-2862

IRB Approval #KR051722-EX

This research is generously sponsored by the College of Letters and Science Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Native American Studies