

Bringing Indigenous Voices to the Workplace

by

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Author's declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

I question how Indigenous identity, relationships, and the workplace environment affect an Indigenous employee's experience in the workplace. I had the pleasure and opportunity of hearing and now sharing the stories of seven Indigenous alumni from the University of Waterloo and Wilfred Laurier University, who live and work in southwestern Ontario.

Research shows that Indigenous employees are unsatisfied, have a high attrition rate, and lack representation within the workplace (Hsiao, Auld & Ma, 2014; Liao, Chuang, & Joshi, 2008; Racine, 2016; Scott, Heathcote & Gruman, 2011). My research aimed to understand the sources of satisfaction and retention for Indigenous employees within the workplace. To do this, I had conversations about their experiences within the organizations that they work.

The themes discussed in the conversations covered cultural identity, workplace relationships, communication, and workplace environment. The first theme surrounding identity comes from my journey surrounding my indigeneity¹, my changing identity, and the impact it has had on my experience throughout life, in school, and within the workplace. The second theme, communication, comes from the understanding that communication is a part of every organizational process and is related to task performance, job satisfaction, and trust. (Adair, Buchan, Chen, & Liu, 2016). The third theme, relationships, is a big part of the workplace experience for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Burgess & Dyer, 2009; Venkataramani, Labianca, & Grosser, 2013). The fourth and final theme, the workplace environment, is taken into consideration as it is another large part of the experience of Indigenous employees within the workplace.

¹ Indigeneity: Indigenousness (Weaver, 2000)

In order to have a full understanding of the experience of an Indigenous employee, it was necessary to use Indigenous research methods. I had four relational conversations with each participant that ranged from 45 minutes to an hour in length and took place in the majority of my participant's workplaces. It was vital that I had a minimum of four conversations to establish a meaningful relationship with my participants. The conversations were recorded, and after speaking with all seven participants, I listened to the recorded conversations, read the transcripts, and created gemstone stories by re-storying what was shared in the conversations with the Indigenous employees.

As I began to listen and re-story what I heard through the conversations, a number of themes emerged. To understand and organize all of these themes, I developed what I am calling the Wholistic Organizational Framework modeled on Kathy Absolon's Wholistic Theory Framework (Absolon, 2010). After placing the themes within the framework, I began to make meaning of everything that came to the surface.

Through hearing the Indigenous employees' experiences in the workplace, as a community member, I am hoping that I can share my findings with organizations to create a positive, supportive workplace experience where Indigenous employees thrive, have a sense of belonging, and know that their voices are being heard. As an Indigenous scholar, I hope to contribute to decolonizing, restoring, and revitalizing Indigenous research methods.

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First, I thank the creator for giving me the strength to get through this process, and I thank my Gemstones for sharing their voices, and their stories with me. I thank my children and family for their understanding and support during this process.

I am grateful to the original caretakers of this land in which my family can currently live and work upon, and I would like to acknowledge the people who lived in this territory before colonization. The traditional territory of the Attawandaron, Anishinabek, and Haudenosaunee peoples. The Haldimand Tract is a landmass that encompasses 6 miles on each side of the Grand River.

Next, I thank Lori Campbell for encouraging me to apply to the Master's program in Industrial-Organizational Psychology, because graduate school was never on my radar. I am eternally grateful for Lori's mentorship, guidance, and friendship throughout my Master's experience. I am thankful for my supervisor Wendi Adair, who made space for Indigenous² research within the IO Psychology department, and would like to acknowledge support from the Indigenous Workways project. I am eternally grateful to my friend Kathy Absolon for the guidance of my thesis, and for working with me in a supervisory position. I would like to acknowledge Darren Thomas, who gave guidance at the beginning of my journey as a Master's student and shared knowledge of Indigenous Psychology. I am thankful to Susan Roy for the various projects that we have worked on together, and for taking the time to be my second reader.

² Indigenous, Aboriginal, and Native is used throughout this thesis to refer to First Nation, Metis, and Inuit people in Canada.

My personal support network has been there for me over the past three years from the start to the finish of this project in various capacities. Nya:weh to Anika Sehgal, Amber Shilling, Heather George, Amy Shawanda, Leah Conner, Kelsey Hewitt. I would also like to acknowledge the Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre that has supported my journey to develop and strengthen my Indigeneity. Lastly, I would like to thank the Two-row research partnership group for hearing my research project, and giving feedback that I could carry forward in my work.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to all living and non-living beings

To all my relations

To my daughters and all the children to take on this wild world

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1.0 Introduction

Work is an essential component of life and can promote well-being or it can lead to suffering. It plays a fundamental role in the lives of people and communities, and it contributes to the overall social and economic welfare of people (Marshall, Stewart, Popadiuk, & Lawrence 2012). In other words, work is a necessary component of life that can either uplift people or bring them down; it also contributes meaning and identity to our lives (Amundson, 2006).

In this thesis, I bring the voices of seven Indigenous employees to organizational scholars and practitioners and to Indigenous student centers to broaden our understanding of employee well-being, satisfaction, and engagement for this underrepresented minority group. I explore the reasons that research shows low job satisfaction, high turnover rate, and a lack of representation of Indigenous peoples in the workplace (Hsiao, Auld, & Ma, 2014; Liao, Chuang, & Joshi, 2008; Racine, 2016; Scott et al., 2011). My research questions address these issues at the individual and interpersonal level, but I also ask what is taking place at the organizational level that is causing this experience for Indigenous employees.

The overall purpose and goal of this research is to contribute to creating psychologically safe workspaces for Indigenous employees and to amplify their stories that give insight into Indigenous employee experiences in the workplace. Historically Indigenous voices have been marginalized and silenced (Kovach, 2010), and Indigenous peoples are underrepresented in organizations and are recognized in Employment Equity Legislation as one of four disadvantaged groups in the Canadian workforce (McPhee, Julien, Miller, & Wright, 2017). This research aims to amplify and allow space for Indigenous voices within the workplace. An awareness of the long-term impact and effect of colonization on Indigenous people is finally

being explored, and it is of utmost importance that we explore how it has impacted Indigenous people in the workplace here in Canada.

During this research process, I had the opportunity to hear firsthand about Indigenous employee experiences using the Indigenous research method of relational conversations to speak with Indigenous alumni. The themes explored during our conversations included identity, interpersonal relationships, and workplace environment. I found a number of encompassing themes that emerged as I listened to each of the conversations that will be shared throughout the thesis.

My research asks how Indigenous employees' cultural identity, interpersonal relationships, and workplace environment influence their experiences in the workplace. The purpose of this research is to find out about the work experiences of Indigenous employees to identify marginalizing barriers and replace these with cultures of safety and trust.

A few objectives of this research are to contribute to decolonizing, restoring, and revitalizing Indigenous research methods, and informing future research for organizations to create a positive, supportive workplace experience where Indigenous employees thrive, have a sense of belonging, and know that their voices are being heard.

2.0 Situating myself in the research

My interest in researching Indigenous employees in the workplace stems from my desire to understand why some Indigenous people I have met, share that they do not feel a sense of belonging, trust, or overall satisfaction within their workplaces. According to Indigenous scholars, with Indigenous inquiry, my first task is to understand and situate myself within my research. Situating myself means positioning myself in relation to the research. (Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008; Absolon, 2011).

I am Mohawk Bay of Quinte from Six Nations and Scottish on my father's side and German and Irish on my mother's side. My mother was twenty years old when I was born on August 4, 1985, in Cambridge, Ontario. My mother left my father when I was a year old, and began a relationship with a very abusive man. This man threatened to kill my mother and her family if she did not move to Alberta with him, so of course, we moved, and this was the last time I would see my father. For the first six years of my life, I lived in trauma, witnessing the physical and emotional abuse of my mother. We were homeless and lived in various shelters.

It was not until I was sixteen years old that we moved back to Ontario, and I had never seen or heard from my father for all those years. I felt that he did not want me, no birthday cards, no phone calls, and my mom did not even have a picture. I remember calling every S. Burrell in the phonebook to locate him, but I was unsuccessful. After gathering some funds from tree planting, I planned to get a private detective to find my father. Before I had a chance to do that, at 23 years old, two investigators came to my house to tell me that my father had died by suicide and he had left me as his beneficiary.

This left me very confused, sad, and angry, because I never had the chance to meet him, and I never would. Not long after he died I saw a picture of him. I felt a lot of sadness and anger

around the whole situation and legally changed my name from Brittany Alexander Hunt Burrell to Jaydum Hunt. The names both Brittany and Burrell were names that were given by my father, and in my anger, I changed them.

At that point in my life, I knew I had Indigenous ancestry that came from my father, but I knew nothing about what it meant to be Indigenous. My mother raised me with a Western Eurocentric³ lens, and it was not until I was 27 years old that I began to learn about the history of Indigenous people in Canada through my post-secondary education. As I was learning about the residential school system, I also learned from family that my great-great-grandmother had lived at the Mohawk Institute⁴ in Brantford.

This is when I began to question what it meant to be Indigenous. The narrative I carried forward throughout my life was that because I did not have a status card it meant I was not Indigenous. That somehow if I did not have this card I was unable to engage in the culture and could not claim my indigeneity. I became aware of self-identifying at 27 years old in post-secondary. This led me to an ongoing journey of self-discovery that has changed my life for the better.

As victims of colonization, many Indigenous people share a similar story to mine, in which they are self-identifying and rediscovering who they are. At the same time, “there is a growing movement to identify and call-out people who have fraudulently held positions by claiming indigeneity like Cheyanne Turions, Joseph Boyden, Michelle Latimer, and Bourassa. The fraudulent claims of indigeneity are so widespread that the term ‘pretendians’ has become part of regular vocabulary” (Simon, 2021).

³ Eurocentric: As a theory, it postulates the superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans (Battiste, 2000).

⁴ Mohawk Institute: First residential school system in Canada

For myself, and other Indigenous people on this journey of discovering and developing their indigeneity, it is this identity policing that causes a lot of anxiety. It had me questioning whether I should be self-identifying when I am 1/16 Kanien'kehá:ka⁵ and even brought me as far as applying for status. Regardless of the outcome of the decision of the Government of Canada, I consider myself Kanien'kehá:ka, but I do worry about how all of this identity policing is affecting other Indigenous people who share a similar story to mine.

My story is not unique, with many other Indigenous people discovering their Indigeneity later in life. As I mentioned above, it was not until 27 years old that I began to formulate my Indigenous identity, and first began within the Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre (WISC) at St. Paul's University College. I quickly became involved in every activity, event, and initiative that was being offered by the WISC and I began attending ceremonies whenever it was possible. I made my own drum and moccasins. I received my spirit name and colours. I learned to hand drum songs and was part of the creation of the Blue Sky Singers, a singing group of Indigenous women from the Kitchener-Waterloo area. I also attended events across the campus to provide territorial acknowledgments and openings. I immersed myself in the Indigenous campus community as well as the local urban Indigenous KW community. I first came to the centre in 2013/2014 and over the past 7/8 years, I have learned much about my community and myself as a Mohawk woman.

I have come to understand that the name Mohawk was given by the Algonquin nation and that the true name is Kanien'kehá:ka or people of the flint (Britannica, 2021). Flint is a form of quartz. This resonated with me so deeply, because for years I always had a deep connection with

⁵ Kanien'kehá:ka: Mohawk people

rocks and gems. Of course, all nations and races of people can and do have this same connection, especially as the new age era begins to take over. However, as I carried this deep connection throughout my life, I did at times question it. As a little girl, before I had explored my Indigeneity I had always been fascinated with rocks and gems. Over time, I became more familiar with the unique properties, energies, and characteristics that every crystal and stone carried. Throughout my house, I have various piles, and I use them in my massage therapy practice as tools to facilitate healing. As my awareness and strength of my Indigeneity have grown, I do question whether being a person of the flint has anything to do with it or not. Regardless, I carry this deep connection with rocks and gemstones throughout my research journey.

I situate myself as someone who is on a continuous discovery of relationship building, rediscovering and revitalizing Indigenous research methods. I am constantly learning and adding to my repertoire of knowledge in the hopes that the research I am undertaking will help all of my relations. As my knowledge base surrounding my own Indigeneity and Indigeneity as a whole has developed, I have become stronger as a Kanien'kehá:ka woman. I identify with the Indigenous worldview in relation to living a wholistic life: including mind, body, relationships, and spirit. I use the “w” for wholistic to represent wholeness; as in, complete, circular, and full (Absolon, 2016), and I intend to apply this wholistic way of living to break down the barriers of colonialism within organizations.

As a result, in this research I questioned whether having a strong sense of Indigeneity bolsters someone's experience in the workplace, or whether this could cause someone to feel even more alienated. Given my experience being raised without my Indigeneity, rediscovering it later in life, and developing a strong and resilient sense of self, I considered this larger impact of

identity on experiences in the workplace. I also questioned the experiences of interpersonal relationships and the relationship of place and space for Indigenous employees. This was largely in response to my own experiences at the University of Waterloo and the positive impact that the Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre and the people contributed to my overall experience at the university.

Universities were not built to include Indigenous people, and neither were many organizations that are now diversifying. I truly hope that through listening to these voices we can recommend changes that create satisfaction, psychological safety, longevity, and a higher representation within organizations and institutions in Canada. When employees' identities are not acknowledged or are in conflict, they experience low satisfaction, burnout, and high turnover intentions (Racine, 2016; Thatcher, 2019). It is essential that we hear the voices of Indigenous employees in the workplace so that we have a clear understanding of what contributes to a sense of belonging, satisfaction and overall positive productivity in the workplace.

3.0 Canada's dark history

For Indigenous peoples in Canada, the first encounter with European explorers marked the beginning of colonization and is considered the foundation for the realities of Indigenous peoples today (MacDonald & Steenbeek, 2015; Stephens, Porter, Nettleton, & Willis, 2006). Since the time of contact, colonizers have directed a restructuring of who Indigenous peoples are and how they live their lives (Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000). In order to exert control over Indigenous peoples, the federal and provincial governments implemented policies that still exist today to assimilate Indigenous peoples. An example of one such policy is the Indian Act, in which the Canadian federal law governs all matters pertaining to Indians including who is and is not an Indian.

The systematic assimilation strategies to eradicate Indigenous peoples and their way of life are demonstrated through the implementation of the Indian Residential School System (IRSS), funded by the federal government of Canada and managed by the various church denominations (Dussault, 1991; MacDonald, 2015; TRC, 2015). There were over 150,000 children forcefully separated from their parents to break their culture and identity, aligned with the colonial agenda to eliminate Indigenous peoples as a distinct group of people (Czyzewski, 2011; Dussault, 1991; TRC, 2015).

The pervasive attempts of assimilating Indigenous peoples into mainstream Canadian Christian society stripped Indigenous peoples of their ways of knowing and being, inherently destroying their identities. It is part of the long history of assimilation policies intended to terminate the distinctiveness of Indigenous peoples by absorbing them into mainstream Canadian life and values (Bartlett, 1977). It has caused unfavorable social, economic, and political

outcomes that intersect generations and continue to disadvantage Indigenous peoples even today in all areas of life, including employment (Wien, 2009).

Indigenous populations have been faced with immense social suffering due to the loss of cultures and identities as a result of the forced displacement from territorial homelands and government mandates of assimilation such as the residential school system (Barker, Goodman, DeBeck, 2017). It is this unique dark history of Indigenous people in Canada which makes them different from other racialized minority groups. Employers and researchers often take the history of Indigenous people for granted, and few have wholistically examined Indigenous people in the workplace using Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

4.0 Employment and Indigenous peoples

There is research surrounding Indigenous people in the workplace, but it often focuses on the Indigenous person, and takes a deficits approach without actually connecting with Indigenous people in a meaningful way to hear their side of the story. There is a great deal of evidence to support the statement that Indigenous peoples are marginalized in the workforce. (Julien, Somerville & Brant, 2017; Adair et al, 2017). With this research, I consciously chose to take a strengths based approach and focus on what it is that made an Indigenous employee's experience safe, supported, and overall satisfactory.

Indigenous peoples in Canada increasingly represent a potential source of human capital for Canadian employers. They are the fastest-growing segment of Canada's population and there were approximately one million aboriginal people of working age in 2017 (Luffman & Sussman, 2007). Despite all of that, Indigenous people continue to have lower employment rates, shorter rates of employment and fewer positions in knowledge, entrepreneurial, and service-producing sectors than non-Indigenous employees do (Bougie, Kelly-Scott, & Arriagada, 2013; Moyser, 2017). Recent studies like these shed light on systemic racism, which previous studies had not addressed. It is evident through the research that race is one of the barriers to education, employment, and income attainment for Indigenous peoples. High-skill, high-pay employment continues to be reserved for the most privileged in Canada (Newby, McKinnon, Kuyken, Gilbody & Dalgleish, 2015).

To address the complex truth about the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) encouraged those impacted directly or indirectly to share their stories and experiences. They gathered an estimated 7,000 testimonies from residential school survivors across Canada in

an effort to promote knowledge among Canadians regarding the truth of colonial history (TRC, 2015). The truth and reconciliation commission (TRC) of Canada was created in response to the largest class action in Canadian history. In summary, the commission gathered the stories of former students of the residential schools and came up with 10 principles of reconciliation, and 94 calls to action. In June of 2015, the TRC shared the final report outlining 94 Calls to Action to advance the process of reconciliation. Call to Action #92 is for the business sector and specifically asks corporate Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration of rights of Indigenous peoples (UNDRIP, 2007) as a reconciliation framework:

- i) We call upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources
- ii) Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.
- iii) Asks that businesses provide education for management and staff on the history of Indigenous peoples (UNDRIP, 2007)

The UNDRIP is the framework for reconciliation for all sectors of Canadian society, and it represents the minimum standard for survival, dignity and well-being for Indigenous peoples. The first article states, “Indigenous peoples have the right to the full employment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the Charter of

the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law” (UNDRIP, 2007).

The TRC and UNDRIP are beginning steps of trying to repair the damage that has been done to Indigenous people across Canada. The identity of our people was destroyed through the colonization of Canada, and it is unlikely that it will ever be repaired.

5.0 Identity

On my own journey of understanding and continuing to develop my identity, I am highly aware of the layers of complexity that are present when it comes to being an Indigenous person in Canada. In this section, I will discuss Indigenous identity, workplace identity, and discuss the complexity surrounding identity conflict that has been shared through the research surrounding

5.1 Indigenous identity

There is little agreement on how to measure Indigenous identity, and who truly has it. Shawn Wilson (2008) states that Identity for Indigenous peoples is grounded in relationships and that we are the relationships that we hold and are a part of. I can agree with Shawn Wilson that relationships are a part of identity, but I also take into consideration the restrictions on Canadian Indigenous identity created hundreds of years ago with the purpose of assimilation in mind.

Although the agenda to destroy Indigenous people did not succeed, the complexities surrounding identity still exist and deeply affect individuals in communities today. This is one part of what makes Indigenous identity complex and multifaceted in Canada, that the Indian Registrar is the only legal measure of Indigenous identity accepted by the government. Legally, Indigenous identity remains to be determined by the government through the Indian Act (1967) in the form of being status Indian. It was this dominant narrative of having to get status from the Indian Registrar that had me not identify as Indigenous for the first 27 years of my life. This is not unique to my experience, as I do hear it echoed throughout other Indigenous communities as well. Although blood quantum does not exist here, the Indian Act is the colonial decision maker controlling who is Indigenous or not.

Maria Brave Heart and Lemyra DeBruyn in the American Indian Holocaust (1998), share that the impacts of colonialism are seen within every facet of society through the erasure of

culture, ways of being, and the identities of Indigenous peoples. In Canada, beyond the legal Indigenous identity controlled by the Indian Act, a number of Indigenous individuals self-identify as Indigenous in a way that is not dependent on the colonial narrative (Nakata, 2007). Self-identifying is when an individual self-reports their Aboriginal identity (Oldford & Ungerleider, 2011). In other words, a third party is not needed to validate someone's Indigenous identity. Regardless of whether one self-identifies or has status, an individual's cultural identity is not the same.

Cultural identity occurs over the lifespan and is a conscious process and decision that involves being a part of a cultural group. A person's cultural identity is formed through interactions with these groups, and of course, the family and community in which one is raised heavily influences one's cultural identity (Oldford & Ungerleider, 2011; Weaver, 2001).

5.2 Workplace Identity

The workplace is where people spend a large percentage of their waking hours and a workplace identity is formed and fostered. According to Sherry Thatcher and Xiumei Zhu (2006) in their article on changing identities in a changing workplace, identity-based approaches have become more common for understanding how the psychological aspects of work have real consequences for organizations and employees. Identification with an organization is seen as the psychological glue that unites the goals of the employees with the goals of the organization. Within this framework, the way to sustain and strengthen the organizational identity is through worker satisfaction. Organizations that can promote a balance of organization-related identities and other related identities may be able to effectively align the goals of the employee with the productivity goals of the organization (Thatcher & Zhu, 2006).

For this research project, both Indigenous-led and non-Indigenous-led organizations were included. Some, not all, Indigenous-led organizations carry Indigenous values and ways of being, and often take a wholistic perspective when accounting for their employees. An organizational identity for their employees might be characterized by a regular check-in, open communication, and a team based, non-hierarchical approach. They consider their employee's entire being; body, mind, spirit, and emotions. On the other hand, non-Indigenous-led organizations, which I will call mainstream organizations, have a workplace culture deeply rooted in the western Eurocentric way of knowing through implementing colonial policies, programs, and procedures. An organizational identity for their employees might include characteristics such as profit over people, lack of communication, and a hierarchical approach. When Indigenous employees are working in mainstream organizations, they may have an identity conflict if they have strong Indigenous values.

5.3 Identity conflict in the Workplace

In their paper, Indigenous perspectives on work-life (2017), Mark Julien, Karen Somerville, and Jennifer Brant aimed to gain insights on how to provide support for Indigenous employees. They used a qualitative research method, conducted interviews with 56 Indigenous people across Canada, and used a thematic analysis to analyze the data. Their research shows that the struggle to acclimatize to mainstream organizations has resulted in Indigenous peoples having to embrace core identity characteristics that they do not identify with, and in many cases has resulted in either assimilating into or exiting the organization. Their stories that they share are about Indigenous people who have had to adapt to mainstream organizations to be successful within the workplace. This has undermined key aspects of Indigenous peoples' core cultural identity characteristics and has typically resulted in them departing from the organization.

Many mainstream organizations are structured around a colonial framework in which the social norms follow western values as opposed to Indigenous ones. Social norms powerfully affect individual behaviour, promoting conformity to group values and expectations (Hirsh & Kang, 2016). For example, in western cultures the focus is on the self and they prize strength and independence. Where as, in Indigenous cultures, the focus is on the community and collaboration and they prize humbleness and interdependence. The research shows that many Indigenous people have had to adhere to the social norms and to adapt to the ways of being, knowing, and doing in mainstream organizations to be successful. This has undermined key aspects of Indigenous peoples' cultural identity (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Julien et al, 2017).

Conflict between aboriginal identity and organizational identity might occur. Within organizations, there is often a dominant culture and members of the organization are pushed to accept that organizational identity. However, when social identity through organizational membership is unsatisfactory, members attempt to withdraw by reducing psychological commitment, increasing absences, or increasing turnover. Minority members within larger organizations do not achieve organizational identification because of the differentiation between their own identity and the organizational identity, and as a result withdraw from the organization (Liao, Chuang & Joshi, 2008; McPhee, Julien, Miller, & Wright, 2016). With little support for employees to be who they truly are, it was not long after my conversations that two of the alumni left their place of employment for many of the reasons outlined throughout this thesis, the most obvious piece being identity conflict.

6.0 Relationships

Relationships are foundational to the human experience and our sense of well-being and mental health. We have relationships with our family, friends, co-workers, and possibly even the people that we get our coffee from each day. Relationships are foundational to the lives of Indigenous people, and we believe that we have relationship with all things. In this section, I am focusing on a sense of belonging and interpersonal communication because they are highly valued across traditional and Indigenous cultures.

6.1 Sense of belonging and connectedness

Sense of belonging is a fundamental human emotional need to have a feeling of security and support as an accepted member of a group. Human beings have an intrinsic desire to belong, and this need to live collectively or belong to a group generates identity and social reference. All people feel the need to belong, and is the greatest reason to form groups, communities, and societies (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Cohen, 1982; Escalera-Reyes, 2020, Catapan, Peter, & Peter, 2015). If an employee does not feel that they belong or do not align with the values of their workplace, then their well-being is compromised, and this can have a negative impact on the overall productivity of the workplace, and has been linked to negative psychological outcomes across many domains that affect health and well-being (Hirsh & Kang, 2016).

Connectedness is represented by involvement, as well as comfort and sense of well-being, described as an individual feels themselves to be an integral part of the system and are actively involved with people, groups, or the environment. (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, & Bouwsema, 1993; Hagerty et al, 1992). It is essential that all Indigenous employees have a sense of connectedness to continue to establish a sense of well-being.

There is “extensive evidence that indicates that employee well-being has a significant impact on the performance and survival of organizations (Grant, Christianson, & Price, 2018).” If an Indigenous employee does not feel as though they belong or that they do not align with the values of their workplace, then both employee well-being and organizational performance are compromised. This can have a profound impact on one’s sense of belonging within an organization.. In organizational contexts, identification with an organization, department, or team tends to promote positive organizational outcomes in the form of job satisfaction, well-being, and productivity (Greenaway et al, 2016).

6.2 Communication

Communication is woven into every organizational process, and effective communication in the workplace setting is important. It is related to task performance, job satisfaction, trust, and even organizational performance. Today in Canada, with the diverse multicultural workplace climate, if misunderstandings and conflict are not handled, communication challenges may arise (Baker, 2007).

With diversity within organizations increasing, communication strategies that promote both integration and equality within the workplace are essential (Allen, 2017). When it comes to workplace communication, it is important to look at the cross-cultural differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees. There is also a wide variation in communication styles amongst Indigenous people, but what is common practice amongst most Indigenous people is reciprocity and active listening (Wilson, 2008).

According to Baker (2007), effective communication can be viewed as the foundation of modern organizations, and is foundational to workplace productivity and overall success. It happens on various platforms: through meetings, face-to-face discussions, memos, letters,

emails, and reports, and takes place on multiple levels. Of course, communication challenges vary, but communication is important to create positive workplace experiences and workplace satisfaction at the individual level, and organizational functioning and success at the organizational level.

7.0 Workplace Environment

Organizational space is an umbrella concept seen throughout the literature that includes, space, place, region, surroundings and locale, built environment, workspace environments, buildings, and private/public spaces (Taylor & Spicer, 2007). Although the workplace environment varies drastically from organization to organization, the physical spaces people inhabit have a profound impact on their psychological experience (Greenaway, Thai, Haslam, & Murphy, 2016), and the current literature states that employee well-being is directly associated with the physical workplace environment (Uolamo & Ropo, 2015).

7.1 Identity related spaces

Enriched workspaces enhance organizational performance particularly when people are able to live out their identity within the space, and identity-related meaning of spaces has an impact on well-being and performance. People become territorial over space – namely because this reflects an extension of themselves and their social identities. Just as spaces can affirm identities of some people, they can also challenge and threaten identities of others. Identity-related enrichment of office space improves productivity (Greenaway et al, 2016; Knight & Haslam, 2010; Nieuwenhuis, Knight, Postmes & Haslam, 2014).

8.0 Methods

8.1 Indigenous research methods

Over the past several years, there have been Indigenous scholars emerging and contributing to the knowledge base of Indigenous methodologies (Wilson, 2004; Duran & Duran, 2000; Kovach, 2008; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Because of this emergence, Indigenous scholars are employing Indigenous research methods in their research. Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) states in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, “that the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research,’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary.” Historically, outsiders have conducted research on Indigenous peoples as opposed to in collaboration with them, and have largely done whatever they wanted when it comes to the data.

This has led Indigenous people to be largely skeptical when it comes to participating in research. Ethical research must start replacing Eurocentric⁶ prejudice with new properties that value diversity and universality. In the academic context, most researchers do not reflect upon the difference between the Eurocentric and Indigenous knowledge systems (Battiste, 2000). However, things are slowly changing and as Indigenous people, many are reclaiming and creating knowledge systems and research methods. Indigenous people have created a narrative that says nothing about us, without us, where the message is that Indigenous people need to be the lead on anything Indigenous.

⁶ Eurocentric: Worldview centred on Western civilization or a biased view that favours it over non-Western civilizations (Battiste, 2000).

8.2 Difference between positivist paradigm and Indigenous paradigm

A research paradigm includes ontology, epistemology, and axiology. A positivist paradigm dominates most conventional research today and asserts that only scientific knowledge can reveal the truth about reality (Tuck & Mackenzie, 2015). However, the Indigenous research paradigm is revealing truth and reality for Indigenous people, and is making its way into the Academy. I will now break down the differences between the positivist and Indigenous research paradigm.

When comparing the two paradigms, it is apparent that the positivist approach does not have access to the holistic and relational process that are foundational to the Indigenous paradigm. Ontology is the understanding of being/reality - what is real? With the positivist paradigm, it is believed that there is one truth or reality, whereas in the Indigenous paradigm, reality is relational and holistic. Epistemology is the understanding of knowledge - how do I know what is real? With the positivist paradigm, knowledge is based on observable, verifiable experiences, whereas the Indigenous paradigm mentions knowledge is holistic, cyclical, and relational. It is not just mental, but physical and emotional. Axiology is the understanding of ethics and values. With the positivist paradigm, knowledge is objective and value free, whereas Indigenous peoples believe that knowledge and values are one in the same.

Table 1 Compares and contrasts the Indigenous paradigm with the traditional positivist paradigm, and further explains why it is important that Indigenous research be utilized in field research with Indigenous peoples.

Table 1 (Tuck, McKenzie, 2015)

Paradigm	Positivist	Indigenous
Ontology (What is real?)	There is one truth or reality	Reality is relational and holistic
Epistemology (How do I know what is real?)	Knowledge is based on observable verifiable experiences	Knowledge is holistic, cyclical, and relational. Knowledge is not just mental, but physical, emotional, and spiritual
Axiology (Understanding of ethics/values)	Knowledge is objective and value free	Knowledge and values are one in the same
Methods frequently used	Quantitative (e.g. Surveys) Qualitative (Interviews)	Storywork, relational conversations, mappings and remappings

8.3 Relational Conversations

The relational conversation method is rooted in characteristics that align with Indigenous research methodologies, modeled on the work of Margaret Kovach (2010) and Shawn Wilson (2008). I employed the relational conversation method for my data collection, and I knew each one of my participants, but in different capacities. Getting together for the first time provided some awkward moments as I got used to recording our conversations and just letting the conversation flow naturally.

Aligning with Indigenous worldviews, gathering and transferring knowledge through oral narratives is part of the foundation of this relational conversational method. (Barton, 2004; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). It was through the sharing of stories that I was able to develop meaningful relationship, and really hear the stories. The relational conversation method takes a (w)holistic approach by honoring and incorporating the values of the five R's: respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility, and relationships (Tessaro, Restoule, Gaviria, Flessa, Lindeman & Scully-Stewart, 2018; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001).

In the context of the relational conversations, each one of the five R's applies to the researcher and participant. Respect is shared when the researcher and participant both acknowledge their interdependence, where the researcher and participant acknowledge and accept each other's lived experiences and truths. When the researcher and participant share knowledge and contribute to the conversation, relevance is experienced. Both the researcher and participant experience reciprocity as they exchange information and learn from each other. Naturally and gradually over time trust develops and responsibility is established, and in turn relationships are established. There is attention to the whole person and connectedness between the researcher, participant, and all relations.

There is a power balance and non-hierarchical nature of relational conversations, which was an intentional dismantling of the hierarchy within the research process. Both the participant and the researcher have equal power and share their truths. This equality is essential to developing a reciprocal relationship and reduces the psychological distance between the researcher and participant, which makes the relationship stronger. Both researcher and participant listen and learn from each other and they build upon the ideas and knowledge shared during their time together. Their relationality exists within the physical and psychological space between them.

The conversations were open-ended and had guiding questions that helped loosely direct the co-creation of knowledge between the researcher and the participant. This relational conversation method focuses on the depth of the relationship and the ability of the researcher and participant to share their knowledge in a collaborative and comfortable manner. Through this process, power is given back to Indigenous people and their communities.

8.3.1 Relational conversation format

I would like to acknowledge that the format of this method is modelled on the thorough work of Indigenous scholars Margaret Kovach and Shawn Wilson. In this section, I will outline the relational conversation format that I used for my research project. The diagram below is a quick snapshot of the format of the relational conversations that I used to answer my research question.



The order of the conversations were set up to build upon one another. The first meeting focused on introductions and getting to know each other. This is the most basic conversation that opens up the doorway to start developing a relationship with the individual. The second meeting focused on experiences at work and stories surrounding employment. The third meeting built upon the other two, with the intention of reaching the depth needed to share information that is more personal. This conversation emphasized cultural identity within and outside of the workplace. The last meeting focused on debriefing and closing the conversation.

Although this formula was put forth as a structure to follow throughout the relational conversation procedure, it is important to remember that flexibility within this process is essential. There are no hard and fast rules, and allowing things to unfold as organically as possible lends to the nature of this Indigenous research method. I will now go into more detail about the guiding questions, and more in depth procedure of the relational conversations for this research question.

During the first conversation, I offered the participants tobacco to ask them to share their stories, we then smudged if we were able, and then instead of giving a consent form to sign, I offered oral consent so they could sign the form without having to read into the tiny details.

Through the consent process, I also ask the participants if I can record our conversations, transcribe them, and make meaning from their stories. The theme within this first meeting was about getting to know each other. The three guiding questions for this conversation were 1. Tell me about your experience at the University of Waterloo/Wilfrid Laurier University?; 2. When you were a student here were you aware of the Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre?; 3. How did your experiences at Waterloo influence your subsequent work or career path? If I did not know the person very well this conversation was about breaking the ice, developing a comfort between the participant, and myself so that we could talk, and sharing with one another so we could get a general sense of each other's energy and begin the journey of building relationship.

In the second conversation we discussed identity and how Indigenous employees felt about their cultural identity and their Indigeneity. We talked about whether their Indigeneity affected their experience at work. The theme within this conversation was identity. The three guiding questions for this conversation were: 1. What does your Indigeneity mean to you?; 2. How does your Indigeneity influence your interactions and relationships at work?; 3. How does your Indigeneity impact your experiences at work?

The third conversation was about interpersonal relationships at work, communication, trust, and the workplace environment. These are the three guiding questions for the third conversation. 1. As an Indigenous person, how would you describe communication in your workplace? a. Have there been times when you experienced misunderstanding (others didn't understand what you said or you didn't understand what others said?) b. Have you felt that your communication style is different from your non-Indigenous counterparts? (Can you give an example?) 2. How would you describe your relationships with others in your organization? a. Have you experienced conflict at work and can you tell me about it? b. Do you have a trusting

relationship with anyone at work? Who? Why do you feel there is trust between you? 3. Tell me about your relationship to your work environment, for example the place and space around you.

a. Are there any spaces inside or out where you feel a connection to your Indigeneity? b. Are there any spaces that you do not feel comfortable in specifically because of being Indigenous?

To tie it all together we had a final conversation during which they were able to provide feedback about their experience of the research process. The guiding questions for the final conversation were: 1. Are there any changes that you would like to make to your transcript?; 2. Is there anything that came to you later and that you think should be included? 3. Is there anything that you would like to share about how this experience felt for you?

After determining the relational conversation format, and outlining the guiding questions for the conversations, I thought it was important to outline the difference between relational conversations and semi-structured interviews.

8.3.2 Difference between relational conversations and semi-structured interviews

Several key points distinguish relational conversations from the semi-structured interview widely used in qualitative research. Multiple conversations are needed to build relational trust. With the semi-structured interviews, the researcher holds the power, whereas in the relational conversation both the participant and the researcher have equal power. With the semi-structured interview, only the participant is sharing their truth, whereas within the relational conversation, both researcher and participant share their truths. When it comes to questions, within the semi-structured interview they are generally organized around pre-determined open-ended questions; as where the relational conversation has guiding questions that do not necessarily need to be asked if the answers present themselves throughout the conversation. The relational conversation

takes a holistic approach, and includes four conversations, split up into four different visits that are explained in the section above.

Table 2: Differences between semi-structured interviews and relational conversations

Differences	Semi-Structured Interview	Relational Conversation
Number of conversations	One session	Multiple to build trust
Power in the session	Held by the researcher	Equal power
Who is sharing their truth	Participant	Researcher and participant
Questions	Pre-determined open-ended questions	Guiding questions

After the format of the relational conversations was determined, and the guiding questions were outlined for my research project, ethics were submitted and approved, and it was time to recruit participants.

8.4 Participants

According to Shawn Wilson (2008) in his book, *Research is Ceremony*, conversations build trust and relational accountability, with an emphasis on the importance of relationships. Considering this, when I received the potential participant list of Indigenous alumni from the Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre and Wilfred Laurier University, it seemed logical to seek out participants from the list that I had a previous acquaintance with.

First, I would like to acknowledge that the Kitchener-Waterloo urban Indigenous community and the academic Indigenous communities in southwestern Ontario are quite small, which means that everyone knows everyone. Although confidentiality is not a necessary

component in Indigenous methods, I still wanted to protect the identity of my participants and assign them pseudo-names. Sensitive information was shared through the relational conversations with me and so I modified the personal information of my participants to provide confidentiality. Confidentiality and anonymity are ethical practices created to protect the privacy of participants throughout the research process (Allen, 2017).

My deep connection with gemstones has informed how I situate myself in relation to this research. It seemed natural to give each participant a gemstone name. Given the depth of time and space that I had spent with each participant, I chose their gemstone name based on their personality properties that I had come to know through my time with them. Below I share the voices of my participants through gemstone stories.

I reached out to participants that I had a previous acquaintance with through email with an outline of my research project, gave an overview of the study, explained how I intended for the research process to unfold, and waited to hear back about participating in the study. I received responses intermittently and arranged to meet with each person on their terms. Once I had all seven participants confirmed, I contacted each participant to see what made sense for their schedule, and I began to book the first meeting in person. I travelled to where they were to meet them for the conversations. I was able to connect with most of my participants in their actual workspace, and I would spend anywhere from 45-75 minutes with each participant in person for each conversation.

The journey of sharing relationship and conversation with my participants transformed the way that I connected with them as people. Each person shared so much in-depth knowledge that moved beyond the scope of my research questions. The time shared together was extremely meaningful, and I am forever grateful to those who chose to take time to share their story with

me. In gathering stories about the experiences of Indigenous peoples in the workplace, I experienced more than I could have anticipated. The relationship building, sharing, learning, and listening that took place throughout our time together is what has informed these findings. To them I say, Niá:wen Miigwech for the time taken out to share with me, and to contribute to the future of workplaces and youth.

8.5 Indigenous Storywork

As a method, storywork provides the data in detailed and first-hand accounts in which to gain insight (Archibald, 2020). Story methodology is about decolonizing research that will become a part of the social and historical fabric for generations to come. The story is not unique to Indigenous knowledge systems and as a method is used differently from culture to culture. However, storywork gives voice to the marginalized and creates outcomes that are in line with the community. I chose to use storywork methodology to develop my gemstone stories based on the storywork principles of Jo-Anne Archibald (2008), and they are “Respect, Responsibility, Reverence, Reciprocity, Holism, Interrelatedness, and Synergy”

As the researcher on this project, I have taken on the responsibility of ensuring the voice and representation within the gemstones stories are accurate, and done in a good way. After the completion of writing their stories, I gave my gemstones the opportunity to review, suggest changes and approve what I wrote. In doing this, there is an energy exchange between myself and the participant, and taking on the responsibility to ensure an accurate representation of what they shared within our conversations about their workplace experiences. As the storyteller, I shared the truth of the gemstone voices as I heard them (Kovach, 2010).

Grounded within a relationship-based approach to research, trust, and accountability are critical for the story to surface and for the relationships to form through the storytelling.

(Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). It was through the process of having relational conversations with my participants that trust and accountability were created and how I developed meaningful moments with them that the stories came to the surface.

8.6 Making Meaning (Analysis of Data)

This process was not an easy one; it was multifaceted and complex. As an emerging scholar, I had never done anything like it before. Kathy Absolon says in her book *Kaandossiwin* that “Indigenous re-search methodologies cultivate organic processes, emerge naturally, and are unplanned and unpredictable” (Kathy Absolon, 2011, p 89). This quote, along with other Indigenous scholars helped keep me grounded through the unpredictable process of making meaning.

Interpreting, making meaning, and writing the stories took place over the past two years. It took a large amount of time for two main reasons. One of them was the COVID-19 pandemic where my two children were home with me in isolation for several months, which made it hard to write. The other reason was that I had to determine how to approach this process to fit within the constraints of the Academy, while also staying true to myself and what I know about Indigenous research methodologies.

I recognized as time passed during the pandemic how it was fundamental to connect with other scholars who have used Indigenous research methods during the making meaning process. There are endless friends and other scholars, who were a part of my meaning-making journey. I cannot list them all in this part of the paper, but the Director of the Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre Lori Campbell, Dr. Kathy Absolon, Dr. Amber Shilling and Dr. Amy Shawanda were four close friends and Indigenous scholars who were there for me to reflect, process, make meaning, and ultimately get everything down on paper throughout the whole process. Another

close friend, PhD candidate and Indigenous scholar, Heather George introduced me to the Two Row Research Partnership group from Six Nations Polytechnic, where I was able to participate in a monthly meeting with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars to present my research, gather feedback, and receive and provide support.

The start of the making meaning process was when I began listening to the conversations I had with participants and reading their transcripts. I had the pleasure of listening to and processing the stories of my participants. After a lot of thought, I decided that I wanted to capture their stories in their fullness, and decided that I would make meaning by listening to conversations one to four for each participant in turn. This allowed me to have a wholistic understanding of each individual story that I had heard. Since they were all captured at different moments in time, listening to all four conversations participant-by-participant provided an understanding of what I heard them share around identity, relationships, and workplace environment.

When I began the meaning-making process, I did not have a framework in which I had planned to analyze my data once collected. As a result, as I listened and read the transcripts I began writing emerging themes from the conversations on sticky notes, and there were more than I imagined. This was when I questioned how I was going to take the themes and make sense of what I had heard. I connected with my supervisors and it was brought to my attention that I needed a framework to organize the themes that had emerged. With the help of my supervisors and modelled on Kathy Absolon's Wholistic Theory Framework based on the medicine wheel teachings and applied to the earth's structure, as gemstones are found in different layers of the earth's strata, I developed my framework.

8.7 Wholistic Organizational Framework

For many Indigenous nations, the circle is a sacred symbol that appears throughout everyday life in the form of the sun, the moon, the earth, and so much more. On a functional level when Indigenous people gather in circles it elicits connection, relationship building, and self-development (Gagnon, 2011; Pranis et al, 2003).

Kathy Absolon (1993) states that the goal of the paper Indigenous Wholistic Theory is to present a knowledge set that can be used to guide further practice for the purposes of wholistic assessment. She writes, and I quote, “that Indigenous wholistic theory is whole, ecological, cyclical and relational. The Medicine Wheel, Four Directions and Circles have been used as an effective and appropriate means for developing healing strategies. The concentric circles represents a level of being and illustrates the reciprocal interconnections of self, individual, family, community, nation, society and creation. At the centre is a tiny circle representing the Self. The next circle represents family, then the community, then the nation, society and outward to the ecology of creation” (Absolon, 2010).



The Wholistic Organizational Framework was modelled on Kathy Absolon's (2010) Indigenous Wholistic Theory, and was created to facilitate knowledge production and understanding to improve the lives of Indigenous people in all organizations. This framework can be used to facilitate future research around employee experiences in the workplace. The framework I developed to make meaning of the data mimics the earth's structure to represent the organizational structure, and focuses on the layers within the organization that are considered to have meaning for Indigenous people within the context of the workplace.

Through examining the external forces embedded within the organizational structure that contribute to that experience, there may be an opportunity to get a comprehensive representation of the components that indirectly or directly affect an Indigenous individual's experience within an organization.

Within the centre of the earth, we have the individual, and every time that an individual is within the organization, the different layers within the organization affect them and vice versa. When modeling this framework on the medicine wheel, I recognized that the self was at the centre. In the east direction, I see identity, beginning, history, and spirituality. The inner core of the earth represents the self, and all of the elements that come with the east. In the south direction, I see relationships, kinship systems, community, elders, and protocols. The outer core represents workplace relationships, with theoretical elements of relationships, emotions, community, and elders and all that comes with the south. In the west direction, I see the mental, respect, reasons and Indigenous knowings. The crust represents the organizational culture within the workplace, with theoretical elements of the mind and all that comes with the west. In the north direction, I see the physical, collective work. The mantle represents the physical workplace environment, with the theoretical elements being body, place, and space. (Absolon, 1993). As I worked through developing this framework, a theory that I learned about in sociology in my undergrad came to mind.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory looks at a child's development within the context of the system of relationships that form their environment. This theory defines the "layers" of environment, and how each layer has an effect on the child's development. Changes or conflict in one layer will ripple throughout other layers. Bronfenbrenner's structure of environment consists of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The microsystem is the layer closest to the child, and encompasses relationships and interactions in their immediate surroundings, for example their family, school, or neighbourhood. The mesosystem is the layer that provides the connection between the structures of the child's microsystem, for example: the connection between the child's teacher and his

parents. The exosystem defines the larger social system in which the child does not function directly, for example parent workplace schedules. The macrosystem layer may be considered the outer most layer of the child's environment, for example cultural values, customs, and laws. The chronosystem is the system that encompasses the dimensions of time as it relates to a child's environment, for example externally a parents death or internally the physiological changes as they get older.

In exploring and remembering the Bronfenbrenners Ecological Systems Theory, I simultaneously remember how much I love it. I also came to recognize that my wholistic organizational framework draws some parallels and synchronicities within its presentation to his systems theory. The findings from this research project have been organized within the Wholistic Organizational Framework and re-storied to gain an understanding of Indigenous employee experiences in the workplace.

9.0 Re-storying (Findings)

Important and beautiful information was shared through each one of my conversations with my participants. However, not all of it applied to the research questions. While I was working through re-storying what my participants had shared through our relational conversations, I kept the Wholistic Organizational Framework in mind. This section offers a thorough presentation of the findings through the gemstone stories organized within the Wholistic Organizational Framework.

9.1 Participant voices shared as gemstone stories

While still providing a deep and meaningful connection with the participants, I have assigned names of gemstones to each person I had conversations with. These names were assigned based upon the personal characteristics of the participant aligning with properties of the crystal. The gemstone voices that I share in this thesis are Amethyst, Lapis Lazuli, Turquoise, Sunstone, Hematite, Onyx, and Mookaite. The gemstone stories share the voices of my participants through re-storying what I heard in the relational conversations. Each gemstone will be introduced, and I will share the qualities and properties that informed the gemstone name that I assigned to them.

I share these Indigenous employee stories through a similar outline as the relational conversations. I will go into detail about who they are as an individual, their workplace identity, workplace relationships, organizational culture, and workplace environment. In alignment with the principles of OCAP and Indigenous ways of knowing, my gemstones were given the opportunity to review their stories and make changes where necessary (Kovach, 2010; Absolon; 2011).

9.1.1 Turquoise's story

“ I really like this topic and what you're doing because I think other Indigenous professionals, I've talked to them and it's been a recurring theme. I feel like the themes you discuss in terms of identity, workplace. This is all things I discuss with other people like business people and at the end it will be this entire venting session centered on all these topics and it's effecting a lot of people (Turquoise, 2019).”

I would like to introduce Turquoise. This gemstone represents compassion, communication, and self-acceptance. These characteristics were evident in the way that they shared their journey and the life changing decisions they embraced through the need to contribute. They developed an awareness that they were not fulfilling their life's purpose in their workplace and decided to make a change.

This gemstone identifies as African-Jamaican and Irish-Algonquin. They were not raised with their Indigeneity, but as they have developed and discovered it, they have found that it has provided a more grounded and connected experience in life. Within their immediate family, they were the first to explore their Indigenous roots, and the desire to learn about their heritage [or ancestry] influenced other family members. Given that their Indigeneity was developed later in life, they do question whether it represents a cultivated cultural identity or whether it is something that is inherently who they are. They experienced internalized shame around being raised in the city as opposed to on the reserve and they feel the need to validate their Indigeneity to other people in and outside of the workplace.

In relation to the workplace, they have held an account manager position over the past three years at a financial institution. On the floor where they physically work, they are the only Indigenous person or person of colour. As such, they explained to me that their co-workers and higher-ups burden them with questions about Indigenous-related perspectives or insights. They

are often pigeonholed⁷ as the Indigenous person, with their organization highlighting that they are a "specialized Indigenous banker," but not providing support for the role.

This individual is passionate about helping build Indigenous communities and teaching new skills, beyond making profits. "This is viscerally, this is a part of, this is the kind of work that would charge me up on my daily duties and make my daily duties more effective. It's hard to recognize that setting the time aside for that, if I have to come in late or do extra time, just to set aside two extra hours every once a month, every few months. Huge in terms of brand awareness but also in terms of employee satisfaction. And absolutely critical, because all those fit the line with my own development goals. There's no extra money for them" (Turquoise, 2019). This gemstone mentioned how community and connectivity were essential to them – connecting with coworkers and relationship building were one of their gifts.

Turquoise is great at connecting with people of all ages and backgrounds and they do not place people on pedestals. They experienced relationships on three levels: superiors, co-workers, and clients. These relationships varied within the levels, but every relationship that existed affected this gemstone's workplace experience. Turquoise valued relationships and believed that building meaningful relationships takes time. However, they did feel isolation and tension around being the only Black/Indigenous person on their team. They felt people had a hard time connecting with them because of their background and being a person of colour.

It was the determination and dedication around relationship building and community that kept this gemstone connected with other people within the workplace. "I would be very intentional about, at least once a day, walking around the entire office and just saying hello

⁷ Pigeonholed: To be assigned to everything relating to being Indigenous

because you would literally go weeks without seeing people on the same floor or your team because you come into the office and you go straight to your office. You're busy all day, your phone's flying it's so easy to go weeks and you're meters away from people and you won't speak to them. So I literally set aside time and that would be my breaks" (Turquoise, 2019). They made a concerted effort to connect with co-workers on their floor and they believed that it was their open, flexible, and adaptable way of being that made for great relationships. For example, they used their five-minute breaks to walk around the office and be in contact with people, they picked up the phone or talked in person instead of sending emails, they went for lunch with co-workers, and they became head of the social committee.

As the head of the social committee, Turquoise focused on building relationships amongst co-workers and creating a more community-oriented environment was a large part of what they contributed to the organization. They went into the organization thinking that everyone would have base training on Indigenous perspectives and worldviews, but they found that few people knew anything outside of a specialized team. Initially, they also anticipated pursuing opportunities to help the surrounding Indigenous community, but this was not something that came easily. It took three months of pushing to deliver financial literacy training to Indigenous community members. They also found themselves going to counseling to talk about the complexities of the workplace because they did not feel they could talk openly with superiors. This insecurity developed around an awareness that the organization's goals outweighed any of the Indigenous focused goals that Turquoise had been excited to participate in.

Communication is an extremely important part of relationship building for Turquoise. They are a very direct, open, and vulnerable communicator who cultivates trust between themselves and others by being open and having meaningful conversations. "I think the

communication between myself and my manager got into a really strong and healthy point. That was a lot of stepping out and calling on...and asking for certain things and asking for the space to do that, the space to communicate. Sharing and being open and vulnerable, when a lot of my colleagues weren't open to do that like; yo that's your manager, why would you do that? Open and vulnerable? That's your job, that's not something you should be with your manager. Well no, this is a huge part of my life, I want it to be like a fulfilling part, let's be open and vulnerable about this and the areas this is affecting. So that cultivated a lot of trust between myself and my manager" (Turquoise, 2019). This gemstone steps out of their comfort zone, which helps others do the same, and the reciprocal exchange deepens the relationships that they have cultivated through their ways of being.

When Turquoise described the physical environment in which they worked, it was described as a rigid environment. The offices that surrounded the perimeter were for higher-up positions and the cubicles in the middle were for the support roles. The offices had fogged windows and doors, and the physical organization of the floor in which Turquoise worked did not foster communication and connectivity in the office. It was common for people to come into work, go straight to their office, and use emails as their main form of communication amongst each other. Turquoise had an office and found that they had to reach out to connect with co-workers and preferred person-to-person interactions. "I made my little office my safe space and my sanctuary. I had my own food, I had vegetables, I had a morning routine that I would do in the morning at work. I had many plants, photos of family and friends, space to stretch, rolling pad. I had a foam roller in my office. Yeah so, I had a great relationship with my office but then some other offices, work piled up and papers everywhere and just like, de-crowded." (Turquoise, 2019). They noted that the employees stationed in the cubicles in the centre of the space would

connect and bond more than the individuals who had separate offices. In line with the rigid physical environment, Turquoise mentioned the formal dress requirement every day caused them to step into an organizational persona that did not match who they truly were as a person.

The organizational culture was described as linear, inflexible, and unsupportive. This gemstone shared a story about a co-worker who developed carpal-tunnel syndrome, which prevented her from continuing her work within the organization. This employee had to take a leave of absence, and when they were injured and away from work, no one from the organization checked in to see how she was doing. They replaced her with someone who could continue to finish the tasks within her job description. This showed Turquoise how replaceable they were as employees within the organization.

9.1.2 Lapis Lazuli's story

“I did the speech and of course the boys started making fun of me, calling me a squaw and doing that wahoo, you know, that call. And I'm like; wow that didn't really serve me very well and now they're making fun of me. So it was grade six when I started not to identify and decided not to tell anybody that I'm Native because they would make fun of me. And because of the way I look and I can pass as white that's what I did (Lapis Lazuli, 2019)”

I would like to introduce Lapis Lazuli. This gemstone represents self-awareness, self-expression and a deep self-knowledge. I recognized this in the way that they expressed all the layers that are tied to their life and work. The depth of awareness and knowledge around the self was present throughout all conversations and the way they shared their story. Lapis Lazuli talked about recognizing the importance of owning their truth, morals, and values and feeling empowered to share and stay true to them. They acknowledged that they are authentic and accountable, and that was hard for people in their organization to accept.

This gemstone identifies as Oneida-European. While in grade three they began to connect who they were as a Native child. Their father told them that they were Native, and to be proud, but beyond that they did not know what it meant to be Indigenous. It was their father's story that helped them form a better understanding of their own identity. Their father was visibly Indigenous and was part of the Sixties Scoop⁸ and was adopted out of his community as a child. It was painfully shared that he was placed in over fifty foster homes during his childhood. It was within these foster homes that he was taught that being Native was something to be ashamed of. Lapis mentioned that they had been discovering and developing their Indigeneity at the same time as their father and that this process has been a bonding experience. That being said, in grade six Lapis experienced racism relating to their Indigeneity and because they were white-passing; which means that based on their physical features, others perceive them as a white person, they began to hide their identity as an Indigenous person, and no longer self-identified.

Throughout their life, Lapis Lazuli has walked in two worlds—which they referred to as “walking the tight rope” — not belonging in either the Indigenous or the non-Indigenous world. As a result, they would live in limbo switching between these identities when it made sense. It was after completing their Masters in Social Work (the Indigenous field of study program) at Wilfrid Laurier University that they more deeply explored and gained clarity of their Indigenous roots. They spoke to the constant evolution of their identity as they learned, shared, and gathered more knowledge. At the point that I spoke with Lapis Lazuli, they mentioned that they are completely confident and comfortable in their Indigeneity.

⁸ Sixties Scoop: describes a period in Aboriginal history in Canada in which thousands of Aboriginal children were removed from birth families and placed in non-Aboriginal environments (Sinclair, 2007)

Lapis Lazuli has been in their position for eleven years and only three of those years have been full-time. The position started out as an eight-month contract, expanded to a three-year contract, then became a one-year contract each year for a total of five years before it was turned into a full-time position only three years ago. They feel a lot of pressure as the only Indigenous person, with an Indigenous title, dedicated to an Indigenous portfolio. “After eleven years, well it will be eleven years at the end of this month. So over the years I’ve been trying to advocate for more staff, like you can’t carry a system in a direction on your own. It’s just impossible. So for years I’ve been advocating for more staff. Which when I was signed the consultants I was like; yes, at least I was assigned some people (Lapis Lazuli, 2019).

Lapis believes that their Indigeneity influences the way that they see the world, and feels that they do see things differently than their non-Indigenous co-workers. Lapis expressed that because they work within a colonial structure they can be influenced by the majority and are pulled into the linear way of thinking and being. Lapis Lazuli feels as though they operate differently than the vast majority of people working within their organization, because of their Indigeneity. They also shared that there is a lack of Indigenous voices and even a lack of their voice because of the structure and orientation of the organization. Many of Lapis Lazuli’s co-workers are agreeable. Lapis speaks about how they choose to be strategic and choose which battles to fight, so as not to be seen as the disagreeable Indigenous person. When they are looking to make changes, they have to frame it as “good for all” (Lapis Lazuli, 2019), because if it is Indigenous-specific, it will get turned down. Lapis Lazuli talked of colonial fatigue, which they said a friend loosely coined as feeling tired as an Indigenous worker in a mainstream organization, being a spokesperson for Indigenous issues, having a lack of support to fulfill job requirements, and a lack of resourcing support for Indigenous programming. Lapis also brought

awareness to the fact that within their workplace, there is no room for tending to the spiritual side of the self.

In regards to relationships within the workplace, Lapis Lazuli can easily make connections with all people at different levels within the organization. However, they only have close relationships with a few people in their workplace. This gemstone sees many of the connections within the organization as an important part of being able to fulfill their Indigenous portfolio responsibilities. There are individuals who they referred to as allies that help to amplify their voice, and contribute to bringing importance to the Indigenous portfolio on their own accord. For Lapis Lazuli, trust exists with a few of their workplace relationships, but it developed over the years and did not come easily. One of those trusting relationships is with another racialized person who does equity work. Lapis Lazuli talked about feeling supported, and validated by this colleague. This is because in certain situations, Lapis is able to vent about what is happening, and the colleague automatically understands. Lapis had a positive relationship with their direct supervisor. With a slow start, this relationship developed into an important one over many years. This supervisor has allowed Lapis to have agency when it comes to the Indigenous profile, which has contributed to the trusting relationship between them. “So he gets a little bit of understanding and I love him, he’s amazing and he’s an amazing support, he allows me to do my work, he’s not a micro-manager. Which is a really great trait in a leader” (Lapis Lazuli, 2019). Lapis Lazuli specifically mentioned that reciprocal relationships are important in this work. That trust developed with co-workers who had shown the willingness to do the work and focus on Indigenous initiatives within and outside of the workplace.

Communication in the workplace is something that varies depending on which level they are talking to within the hierarchical organization. Lapis Lazuli talked about the need to adapt the

presentation of themselves to enhance the comfort of others, in hopes of receiving equal treatment and opportunities for advancement. Lapis shares that “you have to play the game a little bit. So I know the long term change takes a lot more time. So it’s about building those relationships, it’s all about relationship building and helping them come around to their own understanding so there at the point where they’re asking; but it’s just a matter of holding back because I want to pick the right times where my voice can be really heard rather than just saying things all the time. (Lapis Lazuli, 2019).

Lapis Lazuli expressed that they are very thoughtful in their communication, as opposed to assertive or aggressive (which is the way they described some of their coworkers), and they are less likely to speak out, and more likely to sit back, take everything in, and give thought to a situation. Lapis mentioned that communication is important to the decolonizing work, and that they approach things mindfully. They communicate in a way that all the other non-Indigenous people will hear, so that their defense mechanisms do not go up, and they can still fulfill the agenda. Conflict has taken place between Lapis Lazuli and some of their co-workers, because of a lack of understanding and fear surrounding Indigenous practices. “So yeah, there’s been lots of instances where I have communicated something and it’s been completely misinterpreted or misread” (Lapis Lazuli, 2019).

The physical workplace environment that Lapis Lazuli works in is a large industrial-sized building with several offices surrounding the perimeter of the floor space, and cubicles within the opened area in the centre. Lapis appreciates that they have their own office instead of having a cubicle. They like the fact that they can close the door of their office, and have their own space makes them have a sense of comfort and safety. Lapis Lazuli has their dreamcatcher, drum, smudge bowl, several Indigenous authored books, and artwork. They cannot smudge in their

space as much as they would like to because it is not usually planned, so this makes it hard for Lapis to smudge as often as they would like to. “I’ve smudged and there’s nothing saying I can’t- I don’t because I’m aware of how it might affect other people. Which is then hampering my identity as an Indigenous person because I’m thinking about how it’s going to affect other people, right?” (Lapis Lazuli, 2019).

Lapis Lazuli has “been really conscious about not releasing a procedure or policy around smudging. As soon as we have it written down people are like; alright this is the letter of the law, this is how it must be done, and there’s no other way. Because there are some people like that and they just like to follow the rules” (Lapis Lazuli, 2019). There is not one space within the organization that Lapis Lazuli feels completely comfortable in her Indigeneity. They explain, “I can say without a doubt, there isn’t a place...in this institution...that I feel completely comfortable, confident, and safe to be who I am as an Indigenous person with an Indigenous lens” (Lapis Lazuli, 2019).

The organization is structured in a systematic and linear way that breeds power, privilege, and white fragility⁹, and the majority of people who work there align with this and see nothing wrong. Lapis Lazuli stated that it is a colonial structure, with a lack of a diverse lens, “we work within a colonial structure and our processes are colonial, which isn’t doing much in relation with the Indigenous community” (Lapis Lazuli, 2019). Lapis Lazuli finds that people who do not experience the detriments of colonization do not understand it, and those people have to be convinced to care about the Indigenous portfolio. The one conflict that she has had an ongoing experience with is, “co-workers in the organization not understanding why Indigenous education

⁹ White fragility: White fragility refers to a broad range of responses—often in the form of guilt, excuses, dismissal, or anger—white people may have in reaction to discussions on racism.

is important. People will literally come out and say; I'm not sure why we're putting so much emphasis on Indigenous education" (Lapis Lazuli, 2019). The organization is opening their mind to equity and inclusion, but this gemstone is fighting for the Indigenous portfolio to be separate. There are no racialized people at the top of the hierarchy within the organization, and they are doing some work on power and privilege, but it is an ongoing process.

Lapis Lazuli carries forward an intentional mindset when working within this organization. This gemstone keeps their long term goals in mind and recognizes that at times keeping their thoughts to themselves is just as important as knowing when to share their thoughts. Lapis is passionate about their Indigenous portfolio; however, they lack support to fulfill their job requirements, do not feel valued as an employee, and are overworked with tasks that could be spread amongst at least three Indigenous portfolios.

9.1.3 Mookaite's story

"Your personal life has an impact on your work life, your work life has an impact on your personal life. So if you're not able to acknowledge that in both areas then it's not going to work. That's why I think I love working here because they acknowledge the interconnectedness of life" (Mookaite, 2019).

I would like to introduce the gemstone Mookaite. The properties of this gemstone are strength, kindness and grounding. This gemstone had a humble and kind nature, which provided a welcoming environment to share a conversation. Throughout the conversation and sharing that took place during my time with Mookaite, it was apparent that they had a sense of strength and knowing that they could overcome any obstacle in life. They carried their genuine strength and grounding nature to help other people do the same in their lives.

Mookaite identifies as Cree, was born in Saskatchewan and raised through the foster care system for a number of years until they were adopted into a mainstream white middle-class

family as a young girl. It was not until they were eight or nine years old realized they were Indigenous. As a result, they were not raised with their ancestors' teachings or any sense of their Indigeneity, and it was not until they were in their early twenties in college, when they went to Indigenous Primary Health Care Council (IPHCC)¹⁰ that they began to explore and acknowledge their Indigenous identity. Mookaite believes cultural programming that contributed to the beginning of their identity development in the IPHCC program, and now Mookaite gets joy observing those engaging in cultural programming through their workplace on their healing journey. Mookaite mentions that their identity is their roots and culture and that it influences who they are and how they interact with others in the world. Identity affects how they even want their children to be raised.

Mookaite finished their BA, and decided to do their Masters in Social Work, in the Indigenous field of study at Wilfrid Laurier University. Self and identity were more explored and developed through the wholistic healing in the program, which helped them to provide better support for their clients. Mookaite is a firm believer that the reason that things unfolded the way they did in their life was so that they could help other people.

Mookaite is in a supervisory position, and supports individuals experiencing family violence in a shelter setting. They have been working in their position for the past four years, and absolutely love it! Mookaite really loves their position within their workplace, and a big part of that has to do with the organization modeling the importance of living a wholistic life.

¹⁰ The IPHCC is an Indigenous-governed culture-based and Indigenous informed organization that supports the advancement and evolution of Indigenous primary health care services provision and planning throughout Ontario (IPHCC, 2021).

Mookaite made it very clear through the conversations that their relationships within the workplace are extremely important to them, and that relationship building is essential. As managers and supervisors, they ensure that they have a positive relationship with each other, and with the staff. Within the organization, there was genuine care and relationship between all people on the team. There was an awareness and an acknowledgment of the impact that personal life has on work-life and vice versa.

When it comes to communication, Mookaite shares that “we want to keep those open lines of communication healthy as well as - like even right now I just hired someone on that worked here five years ago. So we want to make sure there’s that ongoing healthy relationship if they’ve decided to move onto a different thing or if they decided they wanted to go over and work with addiction, cause that’s my passion, I want to keep that healthy open communication, healthy closure” (Mookaite, 2019). Equally, Mookaite and other managers met on a regular basis, and communication was open and reciprocal. Mookaite meets with everyone individually once a month and meets weekly with their own supervisors. Mookaite shared that working in an Indigenous led organization, with all Indigenous management, and as an Indigenous person, allows them to be who they are.

The organization where Mookaite works is located on a reserve in a large building. In the shelter where Mookaite works, they mention that they feel connected with the rest of the shelter based on the location of their office being right in the shelter, and believes it is important. Mookaite feels as though if they were distanced physically from the people that they work with, there would be a disconnect. Mookaite prefers to be physically close to the families, and staff that they supervise. Mookaite talked about how when they first got their office, the person prior to them had nothing on the walls; and they have made their office very personalized.

The organizational culture within the Indigenous led organization where Mookaite works shares the values of relationality, reciprocity, and an overall caring and importance are placed upon all working relationships. Conflicts are dealt with right away, and whenever anyone leaves the organization, as a team, they do closure. Healthy closure is to talk with the employee about what went well, what did not go well, and what could be improved. There is a bit of a hierarchy within Mookaite's workplace, but they try to dismantle it as much as possible. Mookaite talked about needing to acknowledge that there is a hierarchy and knowing their roles, but also trying their best to stay away from a hierarchical way of living. Mookaite explained that the environment of the organization works in is very flexible, and is centered on their clientele. "It's a different environment here where I've found, a lot of other places that I've worked at vary; here's our rules, here's our guidelines, and here's what it is. It was very; stay inside this box. Where here within my current workplace, we are very flexible, like even here are our guidelines, but we are very flexible, but we're very flexible within those. We are flexible with how we work with our clientele, with our hours – we try and have a movement centered on our clientele" (Mookaite, 2019).

Mookaite shared that within their workplace; managers carve out one hour for each employee monthly for a self-care check-in, but Mookaite also had an opened door policy. "I was just hiring staff and as a part of our list, it's just us looking through, but what's your personal wellness plan? Is a part of our orientation – what is your personal wellness plan? They don't have to disclose everything but just enough so we're like; oh okay. Then we can pick up some of the support if needed" (Mookaite, 2019). It was essential that transparency was there, and that they were able to connect and feel comfortable enough to share anything that may be burdensome,

celebratory, saddening, and anything else that might impact their ability to be present within their workplace.

9.1.4 Sunstone's story

“I’m privileged as a white passing, mixed Indigenous person, I will be upfront about that in every conversation I have. That I totally recognize my privilege and my experiences have been privileged by the fact that I’m white passing. So having these conversations with my family and my brothers still like; I don’t feel like its right for me to identify” (Sunstone, 2019).

I would like to introduce Sunstone. This gemstone is a joyful stone because it reflects the qualities of light. This person is open, warm, kind, and brings about a willingness to give joy and happiness to others. I saw this in the way that this gemstone interacted with me in the conversations as a bubbly and positive person. Even though they were in a disappointing workplace experience in retail services as a cashier—they were able to maintain the energy that Sunstone brings—within and outside of their workplace.

This gemstone identifies as Algonquin First Nation and European. They were born and raised in Waterloo and they mentioned that they will never have status under the Indian Act.¹¹ However, Sunstone mentioned that they felt a need for the external validation that one gets from having status. When speaking of their Indigeneity journey, they explained that their Auntie was the first person in their family to learn more about their Indigenous ancestry and share it with the rest of the family. They mentioned that their immediate family members started reconnecting and rediscovering because of the importance Sunstone found with their Indigeneity. The internalized shame around not being “Indigenous enough” was real for Sunstone when it came to going to Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre (WISC), and was a part what prevented them from going to the WISC in the beginning. However, they ended up going and spoke of it like a second home. It

¹¹If one is non-status under the Indian act they are self-identifying as Indigenous

was at the student centre that they had many of their first experiences on their Indigeneity journey.

Sunstone holds an art history and visual arts degree and when it comes to the workplace, they have been in this position for the past two years. They were initially brought into this position as a researcher for a four-month contract. The job then shifted from researching Indigenous art to a retail services position that was now going on for over two years.

Sunstone spoke of two different levels: superiors and coworkers. This gemstone's coworkers have a lot of respect for them and work hard not to tokenize them. Trust was experienced between this gemstone and their coworkers. There were, however, many conflicts with the supervisor and multiple employees, so in times of conflict when there was a lot of upheaval, Sunstone mentioned that they all rallied together to support each other. Sunstone said that there was no team building with the people that worked there, but they did mention that they were close with the front-end staff and that they all get along. They are actually close because they are friends, who have "bitched, ranted, and bonded" (Sunstone, 2019). with each other around problems with the supervisor.

"I'd say that the communication between coworkers is excellent. The communication between the superiors and the coworkers is awful" (Sunstone, 2019). There are more board members¹² than employees within this workplace, so that goes to show how there is such a low number of people working there. At times Sunstone feels like their Indigeneity is used by higher ups to show that there is an Indigenous person on staff. When it comes to situations that are

¹² Board Members: Citizen boards of directors

uncomfortable for Sunstone, they remove themselves. They do not take the responsibility of educating others within their workplace about the history of Indigenous peoples.

When it comes to communicating with others, Sunstone communicates with their hands. They are an emotional, honest, authentic, and transparent communicator who does not like to be fake or pretend to be someone to get what they want. “I think I'm more honest and authentic, I really hate schmoozing, you know. Instances you know when you're at work and you have to put on a smile and you know” (Sunstone, 2019).

Sunstone mentioned that there is a lack of communication with the Executive Supervisor, and when speaking of him stated that “when you're a white man in a position of power, why would you have to think about other people and the way you communicate, right? Where as when you're not in power, or you're racialized, or you're “disadvantaged” in some way, you're constantly thinking about; how do I communicate so that this is a safe situation for me so that I'm not penalized” (Sunstone, 2019). At one point, this supervisor yelled at Sunstone and then gave her the silent treatment for a week. Of course, this made Sunstone feel extremely uncomfortable in their workspace. They did not communicate the issues with the organization, and thought it was better to give notice and leave the role.

When Sunstone spoke about the physical environment of their workplace, they mentioned “it was not built for any sort of human life to inhabit it. It is impossible to heat so the upstairs was always sweating and the downstairs was always- I'm in the downstairs- always freezing. To the point where my nose would be cold when I walked in the building, you know when you inhale and you get icicles? It is freaking cold. The concrete floors- so I'm standing all day selling, right? So standing on concrete floors all day...it's a lot” (Sunstone, 2019).

Sunstone mentioned that it was hard to relax working in that space, because there were many breakable items and they were anxious that they could break something. It was also a very open space, where they felt exposed and could not separate themselves from the toxic people working in the space. The retail space where Sunstone worked was a space that was shared by multiple people. “I don't have my own office of anything. It was multiple people used this desk and this space and everyone’s constantly wandering in and out of it. So it wasn’t my space by any means” (Sunstone, 2019). They did not have their own space and therefore felt they had no agency. “So physically the way it was laid out...I felt very exposed” (Sunstone, 2019). Sunstone could not have any personal items there to make the space feel more comfortable; they only had a coffee mug. There was beautiful Indigenous art in the space, but it was locked away and Sunstone was not able to see it. They did not feel any more or less connected because of their Indigeneity to the space at work. However, Sunstone mentioned finding solace and comfort in the nature just outside of their workplace. When they had conflict, and felt down, they would go into nature to find peace and be grounded.

Sunstone felt that the overall culture within the organization was negative and toxic, and when it came to Indigenous work, it was tokenizing¹³ reconciliation work, because they were bringing in Indigenous artwork, but not treating their Indigenous staff very well. Sunstone explained that they often feel as though they are walking in two worlds within their workplace. Where they have to learn how to fit within the Eurocentric dominant form of thinking and where their co-workers do not learn anything about the Indigenous worldviews. The management are not interested in having a conversation around Indigenous histories or learning about Indigenous peoples. Sunstone mentioned that within their workplace there is an assumption that Indigenous

¹³ Tokenizing: Hiring someone into a position just to have a diverse body within the organization

people all believe the same things. Sunstone also mentions that within this field of work, because it is a small community, if you challenge anyone then you may never have your artwork shown. Sunstone did not feel connected to their Indigeneity at work, and they mentioned that they were the only Indigenous person within the organization and they felt as though they would have a better experience if there were other Indigenous co-workers. Sunstone did talk more than once about needing “to walk the tightrope” and having to “walk in two worlds.”

9.1.5 Onyx’s story

“I am a person who values deeper friendships and connections. So and I do need people I can go to, to debrief situations that were hard, um, which is, very different than gossiping for the sake of gossiping. Or some of the politics, like getting involved in some of the politics that happen. I think it’s so important to have, like your work family, who’re the people you have to debrief. Especially in this work, like social work is heavy. And so there’s times when I’m sitting with things that I, where, sitting on an island with some of this heavy stuff is not helpful. For my mental health, it’s not helpful for how I service” (Onyx, 2019).

I would like to introduce Onyx. The properties of this gemstone are strength, self-control, and discipline. This was acknowledged through the stories that Onyx shared about who they are as an Indigenous person and the in-depth history that they have overcome to be who they are today. The qualities embodied by Onyx were obvious to me through the stories that they shared and the hard work that they have done to be grounded in who they are today

This gemstone identifies as Anishinabek and Acadian European. Onyx mentioned that a connection of culture and relationship had been fostered through their upbringing. Their grandma had been in residential school and the intergenerational trauma affected their family in similar ways to other Indigenous peoples. However, when Onyx was a child they were immersed in ceremony and traditional knowledge and were surrounded by culture. Onyx acknowledged that they are white-passing, meaning that they are a white-looking Indigenous person. There is internalized shame around this, especially around the idea of not being enough as an Indigenous

person. They experienced racism and prejudice as a child and they had internalized that shame and racism. However, Onyx believes that they have a healthy understanding of culture and identity, and when their family was going through hard times, they would harness culture. Onyx mentions that their identity informs how they understand their work, and furthermore informs how they work with families.

In their first year at the University of Waterloo, Onyx was seeking a sense of community and they found that support, understanding, and comfort at the Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre. What made that space feel comfortable was the ability for Onyx to be themselves. They did not have to explain themselves, their history, or educate people on the various questions or knowledge they were interested in. They had a similar feeling of belonging in the Masters of Social Work: Indigenous Field of Study program at Wilfrid Laurier University. They could fully be themselves and did not have to worry about the added labour that informing non-Indigenous peoples takes.

Onyx mentioned that their identity is interconnected with their work, but currently they are in a mainstream organization working with a diverse group of families, not just Indigenous ones. Onyx has worked in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous led organizations, and mentions that their Indigeneity was extremely important to the Indigenous led ones, but tricky to navigate in the non-Indigenous led ones. Onyx spoke about the position they are in now, which is a one-year contract position as a liaison officer in a non-Indigenous led organization. They work with multiple families, and have a variety of teams they work at in different locations. Onyx mentioned, “if they had something that’s come up, they can give me a call, I’m accessible to all my schools and I really try, like relationship, I’m really big on that” (Onyx, 2019).

Onyx recognized that they had left a part of self behind or checking themselves at the door, and that they had a hard time wearing earrings and lanyards that expressed their cultural identity while at their workplace. They expressed also having a polarized feeling of being either not enough native or feeling too native. However, Onyx did acknowledge they believed it was important to be able to express their authentic self within their workplace; it was just that they did not feel comfortable to do so.

There are people within their workplace who are more rigid, strict and inflexible—Onyx can morph and chameleon into being that way and fitting into the frame, but it is not what they prefer. “Like if it’s going to be someone who’s very structured and sticking to timelines and um; we’ve got a twenty minute block, here’s the agenda. Like I can do that and I can like morph and chameleon in there. Is it what I prefer? Probably not. I feel like I’m pretty adaptable. So I could be in any sort of situation but my preference is always just to be very human with people” (Onyx, 2019).

Onyx shared that they value relationship building, deeper friendships and connections. They also acknowledged that relationships look different from person to person, depending on the teams that they work with. There are many different levels of relationships within their workplace from co-workers in multiple schools, to families, to students and other workers. When Onyx first started, they went to every school and introduced themselves, and mentioned that they believe that supportive relationships are the way that they connect with families. When there is a relationship that is already existent between Onyx and a co-worker, they are more vulnerable and have an easier time talking about being stuck or having a bad day. Onyx shares that “touchstone people that you can debrief with, get support from, and can be a sounding board for all of the

experiences that take place within your workplace is essential” (Onyx, 2019) — they believe in the idea of having a work family.

Onyx mentioned that they were the only Indigenous social worker within their workplace, and they felt a disconnect with most of the people that they worked with. When it came to connecting about Indigenous issues, Onyx only had one person that they felt comfortable to go to. This relationship made it easier to be within this workplace. Onyx would professionally consult with this co-worker to debrief about things, and they developed a relationship with this person outside of the workplace. Onyx mentioned that when you are not the only Indigenous person in the workplace and have someone to share the experience with, it makes it less challenging. “It helps to have people that just understand, and you have no need to explain or go into more detail; you share, reflect, debrief and feel a sense of comfort in being understood without explanation” (Onyx, 2019).

Communication in the workplace for Onyx is relational, less rigid, informal, and flexible—transparency is important to them—and they appreciate directness when it comes to their agenda. Onyx mentions that they connect well with people who have flexibility to meet and just have a conversation, and they found that they communicate differently with people who are structured with time lines and twenty-minute blocks. “And I think that’s fostered because of culture and the way I was raised. For others who share that same value who don’t share my cultural identity, it was likely fostered another way. So it’s not to say that just because I’m Indigenous, this is the way I function, but that certainly informs how I do my work and what I value in terms of communication, yeah. And I appreciate honesty and transparency” (Onyx, 2019). Onyx rarely has conflict with anyone, because they are direct in their communication about addressing misunderstandings or conflict right away. Instead of gossiping and talking to

another person about a conflict that took place, Onyx prefers to put it all on the table and deal with it up front.

Onyx mentioned that in the organization that they work for now, and other mainstream organizations they have worked for, there is this idea of “checking yourself at the door” (Onyx, 2019). They also are seeing that tokenizing is taking place with organizations hiring Indigenous workers, and that these organizations are not allowing space for Indigenous ways of being or knowing. They want them to be present as an Indigenous body, for the organization to say that they have done their part in hiring Indigenous people. Essentially checking off a box, but not providing support or understanding to the Indigenous employee experience.

The organization that Onyx works has a variety of locations. They travel from space to space, but Onyx does have their own office in one of the schools that they work in. They mention that they feel lonely after half of the day spent in their office, and mention that it is isolating. Onyx believes that open concept in offices is better because it allows for a more in depth connection with coworkers. Within the physical workspace, there is no one for Onyx to debrief with; they mention that having other social workers to debrief with is essential. At this point in time the organization does not have a specific space for the social workers to be together in one space, they are spread far apart in different buildings. Onyx mentions that being in non-Indigenous spaces is exhausting, because they always having to answer questions and educate other people about Indigenous people. When Onyx is in Indigenous spaces they feel understood, accepted, supported, relaxed, and able to step away and be themselves. Onyx mentions that safe spaces for Indigenous people is essential within organizations, and they were so grateful for the Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre at the University of Waterloo in their post secondary experience.

9.1.6 Amethyst's story

“ I didn't plan any of this. It was following the markers along the way and doing my work...by doing my work I mean, restoring my knowledge and having an understanding of who I am. Decolonizing myself, my life long journey and the more I do that, the helpers come along the way can help me do that, and help me make sense of this crazy world that we live in. That sets us up to think that it's us that dysfunctional, it's us that savagely, it's us that inferior. The colonial communication is all about treating us like trespassers in their systems. The communication is oppressive; it's disrespectful and replicates institutional racism” (Amethyst, 2019).

I would now like to introduce Amethyst. The properties of this gemstone are calmness, balance, peace, and intuition. This gemstone has an ability to make people around them feel comfortable, and allows individuals to reflect and converse around important topics without a judgemental approach. That being said, Amethyst is also very matter of fact, and is not afraid to use their voice to keep everything in line with living life in a good way. In listening to Amethyst share their story, it became apparent that they really practiced living a wholistic lifestyle balancing all areas.

Amethyst identifies as half Nish and half British and acknowledges that they come from a place in-between because their mother is full-blood Anishinabek and their father is British. Amethyst is from Flying Post First Nation. They were raised on the land, with a deep connection to the land, and to all of the ways of being that were taught by their grandparents—who also spoke fluent Anishinabek. “I live consistently, in relationship to creation and the relationship to the trees around me and my awareness of where life comes from, is what makes me Anishinaabe. How I engage in the sacredness of life every day, makes me Anishinaabe. Do I hunt and fish and trap for my way of life? No. I work at the university. But that doesn't mean that I'm not Anishinaabe, because I am” (Amethyst, 2019).

Amethyst is racialized and brown-looking, they always knew they were Indigenous and experienced second-class treatment and racism on the playground and in the classroom as a

child. Amethyst felt a lack of belonging in the academy at all levels because they were one of the only Indigenous students at that time. Amethyst struggled to get through the program alone and felt like quitting many times. Even after finishing the undergraduate and master's programs, Amethyst still did not believe in themselves. After that, they decided they wanted to do their Ph.D., but that they did not want to take a program that was not Indigenous-centered with Indigenous programming or faculty. It was in their Indigenous led Ph.D. program that Amethyst finally felt like they belonged, and felt as though they fit in—in part because of the representation at the front of the classroom.

Amethyst did not learn ceremonies until they were in their 20s while they were doing their undergraduate degree at the University of Waterloo. They actually started the first Indigenous student group, now known as the Indigenous Student Association when they were there. “When I was doing my undergraduate degree. I met- I started meeting other Indigenous people...in this community...and I started going to pow wows, I started going to Elders gatherings. So while I was doing my undergraduate degree I was in university in a mainstream university, paralleled to that I was also doing my Anishinaabe education” (Amethyst, 2019). After being introduced to ceremony it has been a fundamental part of Amethyst's life ever since. Amethyst is a medicine person, knowledge holder, and a ceremony conductor, who continues to impact community members lives in deep and meaningful ways.

Amethyst has held a director position at one of the universities in Canada for thirteen years. Prior to this position, they held many other positions across Canada and at other universities. Amethyst talks about the difference between being an Indigenous person in an organization, and an Indigenous person with an Indigenous centred position. They believe that if someone is hired for an Indigenous centered position in an Indigenous program with Indigenous

faculty, the organization is asking for the change that the person is bringing. That the transformation happens with the organization because of the presence of the person they brought in to make a change. Amethyst speaks of being the “Conscious Indigenous Person,” and how it can be frustrating, exasperating, and tiring working in a colonial institution. In previous workplaces, Amethyst had low self-esteem and did not use their voice. Over the years of different experiences, they found their voice and now they use it.

Within the organization and position that Amethyst holds, they build relationships with marginalized groups, the VP, other colleagues, students, and the wider organization. They are working on a small team within a very large organization. “There are different layers within the team, and there’s different layers within the university. So I’ll go outward in, so if you think about concentric circles, like there’s our university, there’s our department, and then there’s our team. Then there’s the individual relationships on the team, there are all these- there will be these different layers within my workplace right now” (Amethyst, 2019). There are seven people on the team, and Amethyst believes that they all have common goals around restoring Indigenous knowledge practices, wholistic healing, and decolonizing. Amethyst has a trusting relationship with the people on their direct team, most of whom are Indigenous. Relationships are hard and Amethyst believes the way that communication and commitment are carried out is important. While colonialism has taken away our voices, circle restores our voices and gives everyone a say.

Communication as a team is in circle and is essential to keep the team functioning in a good way. They do not always agree on everything; they do have conflicts. The circle may go around several times until they arrive at a resolution, but everyone on the team has had a say and has contributed to the process. When there is conflict or misunderstanding amongst the team, it is

all about communication and the circle. If they do not do that then the team process is broken down and becomes fragmented and divided. When the team is disconnected they come together to share about life, and if they have had hurt or wounds happen they do a healing circle, sweat or ceremony. The small team of people who hold similar values, have common goals, and who sit in circle together are what have retained Amethyst in their position for so long. However, Amethyst feels a lack of trust between themselves and the larger institution, and they believe that they do not receive social nurturing at their workplace. Communication with Amethyst by the larger institution is poor, especially when it is around getting or inviting feedback.

Communication with the larger non-Indigenous mainstream players is non-existent and there is very little room for direct feedback. Their team is often getting excluded from the decision-making processes in the wider institution and are told about decisions after the fact. Amethyst believes that by operating in this way, the organization is sending the message that certain people within the institution are more important than others, and that those people's schedules need to be worked around. Unfortunately, this forces Amethyst to be "the squeaky wheel" (Amethyst, 2019), because their team is omitted.

Amethyst understands that they were born into a racist, violent, hostile culture—Canadian society. In their position, they have a critical gaze on the institution and colleagues and acknowledge that they are not there to make friends with people. They have been fighting structural oppression and institutional racism as an Indigenous person in positions throughout their academic career. "Being Indigenous and about being in Indigenous centered position. I got the Indigenous portfolio to build Indigenous-based programming, teaching Indigenous courses. Anything that happened at the university that had to do with Indigenous got pigeonholed and sent to me. So in my positions from that point onward, I've generally been representing

Indigenous voices, I've been a portal for Indigenous people to enter and exit into those spaces” (Amethyst, 2019).

The organization that Amethyst works within has various buildings. They reflect on how the structures and buildings keep us divided, intentionally or not—the institution is perpetuating fragmentation. Indigenous people working on the same goals in fragmented buildings and different locations within the same city keep us apart. In the physical the building that Amethyst works, there are multiple floors. They are located on the fourth floor and there are fragmented offices throughout the floor. Amethyst mentions how that does not help them to build relationships and restore connection. Amethyst comments on how the environment within their organization feels sterile, cold, and institutional looking. That the intention of the organization is meant to be ‘neutral,’ but as a result, it feels like the spaces in their workplace are cold and distant.

When it comes to smudging within the organization that Amethyst works, they mentioned that co-workers outside of their team would come down the hall and say, “it smells like weed,” or “did you put in your form saying you were going to smudge?” Amethyst mentions that this communication interaction is oppressive and disrespectful and that it replicated institutional racism. Amethyst says that it is impossible to fill out a form every time that they would like to smudge their space. As Indigenous peoples, although we smudge for ceremony and it can be planned, we also smudge organically as needed. With co-workers micromanaging Amethysts space, and their ability to smudge—it did not foster positive relationships with co-workers who share the space.

For Amethyst, interacting with their organization becomes political because they are constantly pushing the institutional perimeters. Amethyst notes that they are measured against

mainstream standards when being brought in as an Indigenous person. As a result, they have to flip back and forth between self and colonized mindset in the workplace. Outside of their small team, they are only working with people who have a uni-worldview¹⁴. Amethyst mentions that the paradox of working in their organization is like working in the lion's den; it is a colonial instrument that is not easy to change. Amethyst mentions that elitism, colonialism, racism, sexism, patriarchy, and classism are in the forefronts of the minds of players within the organization. An example of institutional racism can be seen as being pulled into the colonial way of doing things. Where, for example, they ask Amethyst to do things a certain way because it fits into their structure.

Amethyst states that if an organization brings in diverse people into positions that they should not have to “check themselves at the door,” and transform the space by being who they are. Amethyst talks about how when people are hired from diverse backgrounds, they can often not be their authentic selves. “When we bring people in who come from diverse backgrounds I’ll say; don’t check yourself at the door, that’s why you were hired here. You bring this diversity, you transform the academy based on if you were hired, if we had a posting because we wanted a clown, we hired a clown, and the clown came to work dressed in capris and a t-shirt, we’d be like; who are you? We didn’t hire you, we hired a clown, we want you to be who you are. If you’re the clown, be the clown. Transform our space by being who you are” (Amethyst, 2019). Amethyst makes a point to say that bringing someone into a position as a token Indian is not okay, and that it was at forty-one years old that they stopped checking themselves at the door because they did not want to be the token Indian.

¹⁴ Uni-world view: Viewing the world from one lens; the opposite of this would be walking in two worlds where we as Indigenous people have to switch depending on if we are with Indigenous or non-Indigenous people

9.1.7 Hematite's Story:

“I feel like I'm not making that much organizational change. Like I'm trying to make change on my team, like when I took over as manager, I'm trying to make it clear to everybody that a mental health day qualifies as a sick day. You don't need a cold to call in for a sick day, if you feel like your mental state is not good for the office, feel free to work from home, or just take the day. Right?” (Hematite, 2019).

I would now like to take the time to introduce the gemstone Hematite. The properties of this gemstone are grounding, clarity and practicality. This gemstone has a scientific and factual based mind in the way that they approached the world. Hematite is very practical, and has a problem solving based mindset, but are also extremely compassionate, and communicative. Hematite is half Chinese and half Mohawk and acknowledges that they were not raised with any Indigenous teachings. It was their Chinese culture from their mother that heavily influenced their way of being, and their Indigenous lineage comes from their father. Records were not kept well within the government, and they had to prove ancestry back to 1900 to get their status. Hematite states that they pass as both Chinese and European, and they often question their identity because they do not know what they are. “It's also been a struggle for me because technically my Indigeneity comes through my father, which is a struggle in a matrilineal society” (Hematite, 2019).

Hematite believes that they know less of the teachings or cultural knowledge in relation to their Indigeneity, and that there is so much of a debacle around pretendians¹⁵. Hematite is proud of their Mohawk heritage, but it is less frequently the topic of conversation with non-Indigenous people. This is because all of the stereotypical topics of conversation come up in relation to being an Indigenous person, for example receiving free schooling or not having to pay taxes. Hematite believes that their family does not understand their identity, but as their own interest in their indigeneity has grown, they have become a resource for their father whose

¹⁵ Pretendians are non-Indigenous people claiming to have Indigenous ancestry

interest in their indigeneity has grown. Hematite has been experiencing joy in educating their father on the history of Indigenous peoples and sharing the knowledge that they are gaining through the reclamation of their Mohawk identity.

Although Hematite is reclaiming their Mohawk identity, they experience an identity crisis all the time, because they feel as though they fit into multiple cultural identities. Hematite states that depending on who you talk to they look Caucasian, Indigenous, and Chinese. However, there are some Chinese people at work that do not think they are Chinese enough, and then there are people who do not think that they are Indigenous enough. When it comes to other Indigenous individuals in the workplace, there is one individual who has shared that they are also Indigenous and Chinese but that they are adopted, and the conversation never went any further than that.

Hematite believes that their Indigeneity affects their experiences at work, and that having a collectivist mindset is in line with being an Indigenous person. Hematite thinks about people outside of themselves, whereas, for the most part, other people in the office are more individual focused. “I definitely have a more collective mind set than most people. Most people in the office are willing to help you if you ask. But their first instinct is to still consider themselves as oppose to; I got this new piece of information how is this going to affect everyone else? Right? It’s; oh how can I use this to my advantage” (Hematite, 2019).

Hematite manages their own team, and does not meet with other managers very often. Hematite believes that collaborating in the workplace is important to increase productivity, and also create more of a collectivist teamwork mindset. Hematite focuses on making the many different types of workplace communication intentional, for both themselves and their team. Hematite believes that the way that they communicate is significantly different from many other people, and that it tends to be closer to those who grew up in tight knit families.

Hematite mentions that the physical workplace environment is open, but it is not very open. They have offices with doors, rooms with doors, and walls around all of those things. The kitchen has a door so that if people are loud in the lunchroom, then you will not hear that. Within the area of the office where there are cubicles, everyone does have their own little cubical space that allows you to be more connected than if you are in an office with closed doors. Hematite has a neutral feeling around their workplace environment because they do not think that it is the greatest space, but also, they have not worked at one that is better. They do not like how confined it is, and find that there is a lack of an ability to easily connect with others in the workplace due to this confinement. They also mention that the amount of space, the way it is set up, and the comfort for each individual varies throughout the office. The amount is highly dependent upon where you are within the hierarchy of positions within the organization. There is not a space within Hematite's workplace that they can smudge, and they were not even sure they could do it in the open space.

Hematite works within a mainstream organization, this organization carries a western oriented organizational culture that breeds competition, and an individualistic orientation amongst the majority of individuals. Hematite's workplace is a large tech company in Toronto, and is in a management position where they lead their own team to advance on a focused project.

The focus within this organization is tech work. There are several small teams of engineers working on their own projects, that can take several years to complete. As I mentioned above, Hematite is the manager of their own team, and they share that they notice that there is a lack of connection and communication across the teams within the organization. Every team seems to have their own orientation and way of working together, but some of the managers that work within the organization meet on a regular basis if they are doing projects together, but

Hematite does not work with other managers and sticks to their own team. Hematite shares that in their opinion, knowledge is hoarded and that they have a lack of trust of the other departments within the organization.

10.0 Discussion

I focused on the research question, purpose, and goal of this research project while going through the process of making meaning. The information that I shared in the gemstone stories was organized within the Wholistic Organizational Framework.

In this section, layer by layer, the findings will be shared. Working from deep within the core to the outside of the earth's structure. The inner core represents the gemstone and their individual identity, with the theoretical elements of cultural and workplace identity. The outer core represents workplace relationships, with theoretical elements of relationships, emotions, community, and elders. The mantle represents the physical workplace environment, with the theoretical elements being body, place, and space. The crust represents the organizational culture within the workplace, with theoretical elements of the mind. Where the entire earth's structure is the organization, we are starting within the inner core and hearing about the experience of the Indigenous employee within the organization.

The purpose of this research is to find out about the work experiences of Indigenous employees to identify marginalizing barriers and replace these with cultures of safety and trust. I began this project with the research question, how do Indigenous employees' cultural identity, interpersonal relationships, and the workplace environment affect their experience in the workplace?

10.1 Identity

Research suggests that the key to healing following the experience of residential schools and its intergenerational effects lies in the area of reclaiming identity (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005).

Identity reclamation of Native American Ancestry in the United States was something that was taking place back in 1996 (Fitzgerald, 2007), and is still taking place today.

Indigenous people within North America have had their identity torn away by colonization, which means that many people are just beginning to understand their indigeneity (Garrouette, Goldberg, Beals, Herrell, Manson, 2003). There are a variety of reasons why individuals were not raised with their Indigeneity, and are discovering it later in life. This is something I heard consistently throughout my conversations with the gemstones. The reclamation of culture was something that I heard from the majority, if not all of the gemstones.

10.1.1 Reclaiming culture

To date, researchers have barely begun to understand how Indigenous worldviews and identity relate to employment success within the mainstream, western workplace. Culture as a treatment is one of the unique ways that some Indigenous communities are promoting well-being from within, where they promote cultural identity and connectedness as a means of treating and reducing health and social inequalities (Barker, Goodman, & DeBeck, 2017). With the arrival of the Europeans, colonization tried to erase the identity of Indigenous peoples. The ongoing effects of colonization and intergenerational trauma have continued to negatively affect Indigenous peoples throughout the various facets of life.

Therefore, organizations will benefit by helping Indigenous employees reclaim their Indigeneity and by recognizing its value in the workplace. This begins by bringing Indigenous voices to professional organizations like, the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) and understanding Indigenous employees' work experiences through respectful and appropriate research methods that align with Indigenous worldviews. Research has shown that Indigenous participants who chose to work within an Indigenous led organization

“felt culturally and emotionally safe being in a place of work that shared their values and ways of being, and felt a like-mindedness between their place of work and their own personal and cultural identity” (Marshall et al, 2012).

Across the majority of the gemstone stories that were shared, each one was disconnected with their culture. That it was not something that they were raised with, and were the ones to bring it back to their family. Participants began the journey of reclaiming culture and formulating their Indigenous cultural identity through an education experience. Amethyst, Lapis Lazuli, and Mookaite share below their journey of reclaiming culture in their early twenties.

Amethyst (2019) shared, “I started meeting other Indigenous people in this community and we started hanging out. They weren’t Indigenous people who were doing crazy things. They were Indigenous people who were on- they were activists and they were working on restoring the culture. They’re working on building community and that was something that I was interested in. so I started getting involved, I started going to pow wows, I started going to Elders gatherings. So while I was doing my undergraduate degree- I was in university in a mainstream university, paralleled to that I was also doing my Anishinaabe education.” In this part of the conversation, both Amethyst and I laughed at our reclamation of Indigeneity taking place within our post-secondary experience.

Lapis Lazuli (2019) shared a similar experience, “I was kind of coming around to my identity but I still wasn’t solid in that at twenty-one. That was a real reality for me at the time. I was like; I need to know who I am so I can help my children understand who they are earlier than I had a chance to, right? so yeah that was my journey in immersing myself into anything I could to try to figure who I was as an Indigenous person. I had some really good teachers, some knowledge keepers, and Elders who I would consider my teachers in my identity phase.” They

also shared that they do not think that there is ever an end to their identity, and “that I don’t think that ever really comes to an end because I’m still uncovering things today about my own identity” (Lapis Lazuli, 2019).

Mookaite also shared that they are still on their journey of learning and gaining knowledge and are thankful for their journey. “I want to say I was either in my twenties when I started to identify with culture and Indigenous teachings at college, that’s when I went to Native Community Care Council. I was able to start- I had some really good teachers who I’m with now outside of work, but they were that great support and that solid foundation for me, guiding me in that direction of where I wanted to go” (Mookaite, 2019).

With all three of these gemstone stories surrounding reclaiming culture, they all did it later in life, in a post secondary setting and had been gifted with teachers and guides along the way. The majority, if not all gemstones share this same narrative, and with some of them just finishing post-secondary—they were at the beginning of their reclamation journey when I spoke to them. However, as the gemstones reclaimed and strengthen their Indigeneity, some of them experienced a different conflict within themselves in the workplace.

10.1.2 Identity Conflict/Walking in two worlds

Identity conflict is defined as conflict between the “values, beliefs, norms and demands” inherent in individual and group identities, as well as perceived incompatibilities between two or more of an individual’s identity domains (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hirsh & Kang, 2016). The literature indicates that role conflict at work is associated with heightened anxiety and reduced job satisfaction, and that in-group/out-group identity conflict is strongly felt by aboriginal peoples when contrasting themselves to those in the mainstream of organizations. The result has been alienation and low retention rates (Hirsh & Kang, 2016; Scott et al., 2011).

More than one of my gemstones shared that conflict exists between their Indigenous cultural identity and the organizational culture within their workplace. Within organizations, employees may abandon aspects of their cultural identity and assimilate to the organizational culture or in them departing from the organization (Julien et al., 2017). Two of the gemstones that I had conversations with actually expressed this struggle of either being who they were as Indigenous people, or assimilating to the organizational culture. When we shared conversation these gemstones were considering leaving their place of employment, and since have exited the organizations that they worked.

In hearing the gemstone stories, some gemstones conformed to the social norms of their workplace, even when these social norms did not align with their own values. The majority of gemstones did experience an incompatibility between their own personal identity, and the organizational identity. Many of them referred to it as, walking in two worlds or walking the tight rope. Lapis Lazuli (2019) shared, “I call it walking the tight rope, I kind of walked that line where I could be Indigenous when it suited me and non-Indigenous when it didn’t suit me.” For the gemstones who were white passing this would be an easy transition, but those who are visibly Indigenous and experience the racism because of it could not walk in the two worlds in the same way.

Instead of walking in two worlds, some participants spoke that they felt the need to check their Indigeneity at the door. These gemstones worked in non-Indigenous led organizations, where they had to operate outside of their natural ways of being to fit into the organization, and leave their Indigenous self, values, and ways of being behind every time that they go into work, aligning with the mainstream values even when they do not ring true. Turquoise (2019) shared, “I’ve smudged at home quite a bit, especially coming home from work...um, yeah. Taking off

my suit, I don't know, was very cathartic. Just any time I could take off my suit, it felt like I was shedding layer of myself. It was these expectations that I had, putting on a suit- physically putting on a suit, I realize it was like stepping into this other person that I was supposed to be.” In reading this statement that was shared during my conversations with Turquoise, it was apparent that they felt like they were supposed to be another person. That who they were supposed to be at work did not align with who they were at their core as an Indigenous person.

As a result, many of the gemstones have abandoned aspects of their cultural identity at some point throughout their career journey. It may not be within the workplace they are currently working, but each one has experienced it previously within their workplace. One direct example of this was with Lapis Lazuli and smudging, when they mention, “I’ve smudged and there’s nothing saying I can’t- I don’t because I’m aware of how it might affect other people. Which is then hampering my identity as an Indigenous person because I’m thinking about how it’s going to affect other people, right” (Lapis Lazuli, 2019).

Other gemstones that are further along in their career and journey as an Indigenous person in the workplace. “I decided that I wasn’t going to check myself at the door anymore. That I wasn’t going to check myself at the door and be who they thought I was going to be, because their image of who I was never who we really are. I was going to speak my truth. I believe I have stayed in my position for so long for two reasons, the first is because they do not have to check myself at the door, and they can be fully who they are as an Indigenous person.” (Amethyst, 2019). This was just one example, but the majority of the gemstones have examples like this and it was dependent on whether they worked in an Indigenous or non-Indigenous led organization.

The gemstones who worked in an Indigenous-led organization or team had a unifying organizational identity that was in alignment with their own Indigenous identity and values. They shared that they found value in being a part of their team's overall goals and felt valued by the members of their Indigenous coworkers. In this way, the gemstones that worked within the Indigenous led organizations within my research project did not experience an identity conflict.

Within the workplace, having a sense of inclusion is an extremely important aspect for workers wanting to remain at their place of employment (Barak & Cherin, 1998). Another important aspect of workplace experiences to take into consideration when looking at employee satisfaction and well-being is workplace relationships.

10.2 Relationships

Shawn Wilson (2008) mentions in *Research is Ceremony*, that relationships are fundamental in the lives of Indigenous peoples. A relational way of being is at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous. Indigenous peoples hold a core set of values based upon relationships and collective well-being, which include but are not limited to the land, the water, the animals, the birds, the plants, creator, and much more. As a people, they are sociocentric¹⁶ and live with a deep connection and respect for the natural world, the ancestors, and future generations. This can be seen through the way in which Indigenous employees put family and community ahead of their workplace (Mitchell et al, 2018). A fundamental concept of connecting to relations that extend beyond the human family is seen in the Thanksgiving address for Haudenosaunee people. How we relate to those around us – the water, the winged ones, the four legged, rocks, soil. We are in relationship with all of creation (Rice, 2011).

¹⁶ Sociocentric is defined relationally, and the well-being of the family, band, or community is of central importance (Kirmayer, Brass & Tait, 2000).

Through the conversations with the gemstones, it was apparent that every gemstone felt that the relationships within their workplace were extremely important. That it was essential for them not to be the only Indigenous person working within the organization. However, if they were the only Indigenous person within the organization, they needed to have people to debrief with and have a sense of connectedness with. Onyx (2019) shares that “it didn’t matter where I was working in this job I, you still need those touch stone people who support you, who you can debrief with, who can be a sounding board for you. Um, and it has to be mutual, but I think that’s a huge piece around just, like that’s huge in terms of relationship.”

For the gemstones that worked within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous led organizations it was shared that they valued and took the time and space to nurture and strengthen their workplace relationships. With the Indigenous-led organizations it was the organization itself fostering a sense of connectedness and relationality through the organizational culture that is really what kept them in their workplace. Amethyst (2019) shares “We have team sweats to heal, to work on our self. Cause as a team- and that’s what’s retained me, the team. In terms of faculty retention, having a team and not working in isolation has kept me there. It’s been the longest work relationship I’ve had...and now I’ll stay there because I’m really learning about the hills and the valleys of the relationships of the team and I respect all of my colleagues. I don’t always agree with them, we don’t always see eye to eye, but I respect them all and even if we have different viewpoints...because we have all been impacted by colonialism.” Here, it is emphasized that not working in isolation is what retained this employee. Mookaite (2019) shared “we have really healthy relationships in our organization and staff finding. There’s a lot of building- relationships building within each unit and as a whole team all together. We have staff days. Relationship building is key and we all as managers and supervisors and front line staff

ensure we have that positive relationship within our staff as well.” Mookaite is one of the gemstones who has had a positive workplace experience within an Indigenous led organization because of values like this.

10.2.1 Sense of belonging and connectedness

According to Indigenous worldviews, sense of belonging is an element of relatedness and connectedness (Hill, 2006). For many Indigenous people the term connectedness is defined as a feeling of belonging, of being an important and integral part of the world (Rice, 2011). Linda Tuhiwai Smith shares that to be connected is to be whole, connecting is related to issues of identity and place, to spiritual relationships and community well-being, and it positions individuals in sets of relationships with other people, and with the environment. To be connected is to be whole (Smith, 2012).

When individuals from a diverse background worked with other members that shared the same background, they felt a sense of belonging (Hirsh & Kang, 2016). Amethyst and Mookaite, shared stories of belonging and connection at work, both were on teams that had more Indigenous people than non-Indigenous people. Through what I heard, the sense of belonging did come from working with other members of the same background. As a result, it is imperative that organizations find a way to support Indigenous people to have a sense of belonging and connectedness, and some organizations have already begun to do that work. For example, this is happening across Canada as cluster hires, so that there are a number of Indigenous employees as opposed to a select few. Hopefully, this is the beginning of many solutions to create a sense of belonging and connectedness for Indigenous employees within the workplace.

Some of the gemstones had an isolating experience within their organizations, and one of the factors that contributed to this experience was being the only Indigenous employee within

their workplace. However, one of the ways that Turquoise shared they maintained a sense of connectedness was through organizing events like, “wellness month and it was just something that we started for this wellness week and every morning we had time to go and do this and it just turned into such a team building exercise. To bring people together, to start your day, to feel fresh, you didn’t need your coffee after that. You just felt more connected, grounded, and ready to start your day after just doing a twenty-minute walk around this lake” (2019). They also shared that when they no longer had access to the lake, they found a way to be connected with others through lunches.

Not only does this feeling of connectedness with the individuals within the organization influence the desire to remain within a position within a workplace, it also has a significant impact on their work satisfaction and well-being (Barak & Levin, 2002). The workplace environment is another part of what contributes to satisfaction, well-being, and a sense of belonging for Indigenous employees. If an Indigenous employee does not feel that they belong or that they do not align with the values of the organization they are working for, then their well-being is compromised. This results in the organization being less successful.

10.3 Workplace environment

Territoriality of physical space has been shown to engender a sense of belonging to social groups. In various settings throughout the day, representations of place and space matter. Maintaining and strengthening the integrity of Indigenous social space is critical to Indigenous self determination (Liu, Aho, & Rata, 2014). Many Indigenous scholars talk about the importance of space, and our connection to the land and the environments that surround us. How they support us, surround us, and sustain us as Indigenous peoples (Kovach, 2008; Absolon, 2010; Wilson, 2008; Tuck & Mckenzie, 2015).

10.3.1 Personal physical space

The gemstones that were able to have their own belongings in their workspace, or were able to make it their own expressed more satisfaction in their space than those who could not. For example, Turquoise, Mookaite, and Lapis Lazuli shared that they appreciated having their own office space. Turquoise found that their office became the social space, and that they had “made my little office my safe space and my sanctuary” (Turquoise, 2019). As I shared conversation with Mookaite, I had the opportunity to see all of the beautiful Indigenous cultural items that they had placed throughout their office. Mookaite shared that a few months after I had entered this space the person who previously occupied the office and position came in and was like “oh my goodness you have stuff on the walls, because previously there was nothing on the walls. He was here for a couple of years before me, like how did he go for that long without any of this?”(Mookaite, 2019).

Whereas Lapis Lazuli (2019) expressed that, “I appreciate the fact that I have an actual office because there’s a lot of people who don’t. I can have all this stuff, I can hang my dreamcatchers and I can have my smudge bowl and I can have all the medicines, which I do use when I’m doing presentations. However, I do not use it in the way I would like to use it.” Lapis Lazuli shared that having their own office and being able to have their cultural items is a positive, but they expressed it would be even better if they could use their drum and smudge freely. Sunstone voiced a similar narrative, however they had a shared office space as a retailer and felt like they had a hard time relaxing, a lack of agency, and did not feel comfortable within their workplace. They did not have the ability to have anything within the space more than a coffee cup, and Sunstone shared the lack of a personal space that added to their dissatisfaction in the workplace.

Identity expression in the workplace is essential for well-being and work satisfaction (Barker, Goodman, & DeBeck, 2017). Through colonization, we as Indigenous people have had our identities ripped away from us, in the name of creating a more civilized way of being for our people. Indigenous people have always had a strong connection to the environment around them, and the structure of large organizations affected their experience of them (Wilson, 2008; Rice, 2005; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Identity spaces ¹⁷that validate Indigenous identity are central to the survival and growth of Indigenous values and identity spaces. Constructing identity spaces that support Indigenous identity development or expression is vital. These spaces need to be created and maintained within organizations in collaboration with Indigenous people.

10.4 Organizational Culture

When it comes to Indigenous people in the workforce, it is not enough for employers to do cluster hires, or to include a few Indigenous people into their organization and have them continue to work within a colonial framework. The typical Eurocentric organization does not carry values that align with Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Organizations that can promote a balance of organization-related identities and other related identities may be able to effectively align with the goals of the employee with the productivity goals of the organization (Thatcher & Zhu, 2006).

The findings from the gemstone stories showed there were two different organizational cultural experiences: the wholistic and transactional. These two experiences will be expanded upon below, and were reflected within whether the organization was led with Indigenous values,

¹⁷ Identity spaces: Identity safe spaces where people can be themselves, where their identities are welcomed and accepted (Liu, Aho & Rata, 2014).

ways of knowing and had a wholistic approach—or whether the organization was led with Eurocentric capitalistic values of ownership and possession, and had a transactional approach.

This was a direct reflection of the experiences of the gemstones where the organization in which they worked were either led with Eurocentric or Indigenous values embedded within the organizational culture within the gemstones workplaces. What I heard from the gemstones was that throughout life and even when I spoke with them, they were often faced with the choice of either being true to themselves and their values and stepping out of the organization, or leaving their values behind when they head to work and aligning with the overall goals of their workplace.

10.4.1 Wholistic organizational culture

Based on what I heard from the gemstone stories, the two times that the wholistic culture existed within an organization, it was within an Indigenous-led organization or team, which carried Indigenous values, ways of knowing and being. When looking at the way that this is operationalized within an organization, the wholistic organizational culture takes into consideration the humanness of the employee, but also the spiritual and cultural elements as well. It is not expected that an individual will come into work and compartmentalize the rest of their life so they can meet their productivity levels.

10.4.1.1 People before profit.

The gemstones that operated within the wholistic organizational culture were the gemstones that were the most satisfied, felt the most comfortable to be who they were in their Indigeneity and one of them was in their position longer than any of the other gemstones. A wholistic organizational culture prioritizes the person over the profit, and places an emphasis on

supporting employees overall health and wellness. A workplace with this culture supports all of the layers that exist within the wholistic organizational framework.

The gemstones that expressed they worked within an organization that had a wholistic organizational culture shared that they felt supported in their cultural identity, workplace relationships, and their workplace environment. The organizations that they operate within are still working to break down the barriers implemented alongside colonization.

A wholistic organizational culture puts people before profit and prioritizes wholistic values that align with Indigenous people's ways of being and knowing. The gemstones shared that within the workplace this is translated through communication, understanding, trust, collaboration, flexibility, trust, and an overall genuine interest to make things better for the Indigenous community and all of our relations. A workplace with a wholistic organizational culture supports Indigenous cultural identity and development, and employees have the opportunity to sit down in circle regularly or connect one to one to talk things out. Management often has an open door policy, and communication is extremely efficient amongst these teams where there is a collective understanding.

Relationships, relational accountability, responsibility, reciprocity, and respect are all important values of many Indigenous nations. When it comes to conflict resolution, wholistic organizations support taking the time to seek resolution, as opposed to gossiping and perpetuating a toxic work environment.

10.4.2 Transactional organizational culture

A transactional organizational culture is seen in Eurocentric organizations, where the goal is to get the maximum value for the organization itself. The organizations act out of self-interest and

place very little value on any relationships that exist within the organization. The transactional organizational culture tries to get the best out of the situation at the expense of the employees, and views all interactions as transactions. (Emery, 2007). It is the opposite of the wholistic organizational culture, and places productivity levels above the individual. Using the individual as a means to an end.

One gemstone shared within their stories that they felt their experience within the organization was very transactional. “My friend coined a word called: colonial fatigue, and it’s so true. You’re saying all the right things but put your money where your mouth is because otherwise it’s just lip service, right? And we’re getting tired. Indigenous workers in mainstream organizations are getting tired of the structures that are set up and we’re getting tired of being the spokesperson for Indigenous stuff for the entire board. When it shouldn’t be, right? It shouldn’t be one person. I’ve been advocating for years that we need more staff, like we need more people doing the work on the ground. I can’t even get out to schools to support Indigenous students which is part of my job” (Lapis Lazuli, 2019).

One of the most common transactional experiences that was experienced by each one of my gemstones in either their current workplace or a previous workplace was the experience of being the Tokenized Indigenous person.

10.4.2.1 Feelings of Tokenism

The Eurocentric capitalistic culture puts the profit before the person. The employee is supposed to come in and do their work, do a good job of it, and leave. It is expected that an individual will come into work and compartmentalize the rest of their life so they can meet their productivity levels with little distractions or hustle. With this organizational culture, any family stuff would

not be supported. This kind of organizational culture does not allow for flexibility, family, and hardly even considers the individual employee.

The isolation, tokenization, and being taken advantage of were a few of the reasons that Amethyst left previous positions. “That’s what I call tokenism and that’s what getting people-hiring people just so they can do this job as an Indigenous person is pigeon holing. When they hire the person, and do not allow them to transform the space with their Indigenous ways of knowing and being? To keep reading and developing our mind and decolonizing our mind and Indigenizing our spirit. We have that responsibility and we invest in that, then we won’t fall into tokenism. We won’t subscribe to being pigeonholed. We’ll be able to set boundaries and say; you know what, I’m not here to do your work in instituting the TRC recommendations, that’s up for you to figure out, I’m busy doing this. We can set boundaries in a healthy way for ourselves that protects our agenda that protects what we are there to do. But that’s our responsibility to know that” (Amethyst, 2019).

11.0 Conclusion

I am honoured to have had the opportunity to sit down and build relationship with the gemstones, to get to know who they are, and to hear their stories within their workplaces. After taking the time to work through what was heard, re-storied through the conversations with the gemstones (findings), and processed throughout the entire experience, I took those findings and placed them within the wholistic organizational framework, and made meaning of the different experiences of Indigenous employees. The important themes of identity, relationships, workplace environment, and organizational culture take a wholistic lens when looking at an individual's experience in the workplace. These themes carried equal importance within an organizational experience within both Industrial Organizational and Indigenous literature.

11.1 Limitations/Lessons

11.1.1 Sample size

This research project largely reflected Indigenous employees from the Kitchener-Waterloo area, located in South Western Ontario, in Canada. Although a sample size of seven participants may be seen as a limitation, it should also be viewed as a positive first step of bringing an awareness to the Indigenous employee experience and voices to the workplace. There is diversity within a single community, and even more diversity seen across Nations. It could continue to be a community-centered project that could be spread out across Canada to bring the voices of all nations to this important research.

11.1.2 Findings are not generalizable

All nations are unique and distinct in their own ways, but Indigenous people across the globe share many similar values. These findings do not capture the vast diversity that exists within

First Nation, Metis, and Inuit people's employee experiences within organizations. Considering this, the findings are not generalizable to all Indigenous people. However, I do believe that these findings benefit all people that have the opportunity to read these stories. They shed light on beginning of looking at Indigenous people in the workplace. Future research could benefit a larger number of Indigenous people over time, and parallel the different nations to see what kind of similarities exist.

11.2 Recommendations and Future Directions

There was so much information that was captured within the conversations of my gemstones. The intimate and in depth time that I was able to spend with their stories really allowed me to hear their voices. After sorting through all of the important information that was captured through my making meaning process in relation to Indigenous employees in the workplace, I was able to gather some knowledge around possible future directions.

11.2.1 Truth and Reconciliation recommendations

Call to action #92 is for the business sector specifically asks corporate Canada to adopt United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework. 92. ii asks businesses to ensure Aboriginal people have equal access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector. 92. iii asks that businesses provide education for management and staff on the history of Indigenous peoples (TRC, 2015).

Through amplifying the voices of Indigenous employees this research is addressing the call to action 92. ii pushing to ensure that Aboriginal people have access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector. I am confident that this work is just the beginning of implementing reconciliation.

11.2.2 History lesson for all non-Indigenous employees

It is important for organizations to recognize and understand the history of Indigenous people in Canada, and the impact that it has on their present well-being. This way there is an understanding around why culture as treatment and not conforming to the organizational identity without strengthening and living one's own cultural identity in the workplace is so important.

Indigenous values also need to be incorporated within the organizational culture, for example wholistic values that consider the entire employee. Where instead of treating an employee as a means to an end and focusing only on productivity, the employer actually cares about the employee's well-being. On a grander scale, or a broader workplace application--it does not harm anybody to having a wholistic experience and everyone, including the organization benefits.

11.2.3 Strengthening culture to increase workplace satisfaction

If Indigenous values are incorporated within the organizational culture of an organization, it would create a supportive environment for Indigenous employees. However, there is a possibility that these values could benefit people of all backgrounds and nationalities within the workplace. Research suggests that when employees' true cultural selves are recognized, validated, and utilized, their overall work experience will be more positive (Chuapetcharasopon, Neville, Adair, Brodt, Lituchy & Racine, 2018, 2017; Swann, Polzer, Seyle & Ko, 2004).

When considering what well-being means with an Indigenous lens, it is important to take into account all levels of the person in their entirety, and all of the experiences that go with that. There are no negative implications to taking a wholistic approach when looking at the individual or the organization, and as mentioned above, if there was a broader workplace application of a wholistic orientation within an organization, it would benefit the organization and everyone in it.

11.2.4 Creating identity spaces

When organizations are recruiting Indigenous employees to diversify their team, they should build in policies to support identity development, and create Indigenous identity spaces. Making social identity spaces that privilege First Nations people, ideas, and institutional practices is central to the approach to self-determination and cultural healing (Liu et al, 2014). As a result, individuals could hypothesize that if organizations promote balance between organization-related identities and cultural related identities, then it will increase the number of employee's from a diverse background. Identity-related enrichment of office space improves productivity (Greenaway, Thai, Haslam, & Murphy, 2016).

In a system that is already established with deeply rooted colonial policies, programs, and procedures that aimed to destroy Indigenous cultures, it is essential for Indigenous ways of knowing to be valued and included within North American organizations to promote Indigenous employee satisfaction and psychological well-being, and the accompanying positive organizational outcomes (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Our approach to bringing Indigenous identity and voices to the workplace has been to invite Indigenous employees to share stories about their workplace experiences using Indigenous research methods. Thus, we developed an interview protocol for Industrial-Organizational scholars to use in field research with Indigenous employees and managers.

I set out to explore Indigenous employee experiences in relation to their identity, relationships, and their workplace environment. I brought the voices of seven Indigenous employees to broaden our understanding of employee well-being, satisfaction, and engagement for this underrepresented minority group. I explored the reasons that research shows low job satisfaction, high turnover rate, and a lack of representation of Indigenous peoples in the

workplace (Hsiao, Auld & Ma, 2014; Liao, Chuang, & Joshi, 2008; Racine, 2016; Scott et al., 2011).

11.3 Implications

The implications for this study are in-depth and important for organizations that are seeking to recruit or include Indigenous employees within their workforce. This research can help inform those organizations on the ways in which they can begin to work to create positive workplace environments for Indigenous employees.

This is just the beginning of research that will help to create action for the TRC recommendations. These findings could also inform future research on workplace diversity and for interventions aimed at creating a more inclusive and supportive workplace environments and organizational culture for Indigenous employees. Although Indigenous employee experiences may seem of concern to only a small group of people (i.e.: the Indigenous community), it should in fact concern anyone cares about equity, diversity, and inclusion work because it will benefit anyone that works in an organization that includes diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing.

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