

Walking the *Red Road*:
Aboriginal Federally Sentenced Women's Experiences in
Healing, Empowerment, and Re-creation

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

In 2001, when Aboriginal women comprised only 3.5% of Canadian women, 23% of Federally Sentenced Women (FSW) were Aboriginal. In the intervening six year period, the presence of Aboriginal women in Canada's federal correctional facilities has risen to 31%. With female offenders often being treated as double deviants in mainstream society, Aboriginal female offenders may be regarded as triple deviants. Considerable research suggests that female offenders are marginalized for being criminals and even more so for deviating from the gendered norm of female (i.e., nurturer, caregiver). At the same time, Aboriginal female offenders are further ostracized for their race and for their cultural beliefs and traditions. This study recognized that the experiences of marginalization for Aboriginal federally sentenced women were linked to systemic discrimination and attitudes based on racial and/or cultural prejudice, and that the low socio-economic status and history of substance abuse and violence across generations were rooted in over 500 years of oppression and control through residential schools and other decrees legislated by the Indian Act.

The growing awareness of problems related to Canada's correctional system for female offenders, and the limited support and services for Aboriginal female offenders, led to the publication in 1990 of *Creating Choices*. The report essentially recommended a new system of incarceration that fostered the empowerment of FSW to make meaningful choices in order that they may live with dignity and respect. Based on the recommendations, federal corrections for women essentially aimed to move from a model of punishment to a model of rehabilitation. According to the experiences of the Aboriginal federally sentenced women in this study, the implementation of these changes in the management of federal corrections for women has allowed many Aboriginal women to experience their cultural traditions, some for the first time.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of major Aboriginal cultural events, notably ceremony, on the identity development, empowerment, healing and rehabilitation of FSW. Data were gathered over a two-year period of engagement by the researcher with women in Aboriginal ceremonies within Grand Valley Institution, a federal prison for women located in Kitchener, Ontario. Six major themes were identified through the iterative process of data gathering and analysis. The themes, *history, conscientização, healing, re-creation, coming home, and travelling the Red Road*, represent the women's processes of healing, identity development and empowerment through engagement in Aboriginal ceremonies and traditions in a federal prison.

The women's experiences with Aboriginal traditions offered personal and collective healing through solidarity, resistance, re-creation and liberation. The women emphasized supportive, accepting, mutually respectful and caring relationships as a vital component in their processes of healing. The centrality of relationships was explored using feminist and Aboriginal theories, and a deepening of understanding came from viewing the findings within the context of a *social ecological theory of empowerment*. Aboriginal ceremony and traditions were considered leisure in this study, and leisure from an Aboriginal perspective is thus integrated in all aspects of life and represents re-creation, restoration and collective strength. It is in this sense that Aboriginal women found freedom, even within the confines of a federal prison.

The emphasis the women placed on the quality of their relationships in terms of healing, empowerment, and re-creation suggests that equitable and caring relationships are particularly important in their growth and development. Women's engagement with others and portrayals of an ethic of care in ceremony invoked inspiration and strength. The resultant *relations of community* generated a network of resources which enabled the women to create change within the correctional setting. The findings from this study underscore the relevance of a re-evaluation of Canada's correctional approach and suggest the adoption of a more restorative understanding of justice; that is, a more Aboriginal conceptualization of justice— one that encompasses healing, restoring relationships, accountability and community involvement.

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Dedication

To the women at Grand Valley Institution.

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YAH WAY HO YAH
WAY HI AH HO
DEH WAY O HEY HEY HO
WA HEY WA HO
WA HEY WA HO
[REPEAT TWICE]

THE SKY ABOVE
THE LAND BELOW
WE'LL KEEP OUR SPIRITS FREE

EE YEH EE YEH AY AY HEY-E-E-E

AND WHEN WE SING
OUR SPIRITS SOAR
LIKE AN EAGLE ABOVE THE TREES.

YAH WAY HO YAH
WAY HI AH HO
DEH WAY O HEY HEY HO
WA HEY WA HO

SOMEDAY I'M COMING HOME

- SISTERHOOD DRUM SONG
CREATED APRIL 16, 2007

Chapter 1 - Introduction

For many years Aboriginal women have been over represented among federally sentenced women (FSW). In 2001, when Aboriginal women comprised only 3.5% of Canadian women, 23% of federally sentenced women (FSW) were Aboriginal (Sinclair & Boe, 2002). Over the past five years, the presence of Aboriginal women in Canada's federal correctional facilities rose to 31% (Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), 2006c). Numerous reports have documented the suicides, self-mutilations and other desperate measures of Aboriginal FSW to escape the pain and anger in their lives (Faith, 2006; Sugar & Fox, 1990; Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women (TFFSW/Task Force), 1990). Foucault's (1995) analysis of prisons suggests that they are institutions of power and control that result in the oppression and dominance of others. However, for Aboriginal FSW, this experience is not their first encounter in a subjugated position.

In addition to experiencing the oppression within a gendered-structured prison system (Radosh, 2002), Aboriginal female offenders have also faced a lifetime of control and dominance inherited by their race and culture. As female offenders are often treated as double deviants in mainstream society, Aboriginal female offenders may be regarded as triple deviants. In other words, while FSW are marginalized for being a criminal and even more so for deviating from the gendered norm of female (i.e., nurturer, caregiver), Aboriginal FSW are further ostracized for their race and for their cultural beliefs and traditions. For example, the correctional system was criticized by Monture-Angus (2000) for applying standardized tests and offering standardized programming which are culturally inappropriate and largely developed for men by men. This marginalization is embedded within systemic structures of Canada's correctional system where Aboriginal women are disadvantaged by virtue of being both Aboriginal and female (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women (CPVAW), 1993; TFFSW). As testified by Sugar and Fox (1990), two Aboriginal women who were once

incarcerated in one of Canada's federal prisons, "Aboriginal women who end up in prison grow up in prison, though the prisons in which they grow up are not the ones to which they are sentenced under law" (p. 3).

One major example of the systemic domination of Aboriginals, which dates back over a century, is the Indian Act of 1876. This Act effectively eradicated the ability of Aboriginals to control their lives and is described as Canada's most effective tool in the annihilation of a culture (York, 1990). The consequences of the Indian Act and other forms of control continue to haunt Aboriginal peoples today as they struggle to heal from the emotional, mental, and physical trauma of their past. This study recognized that the marginalized position of Aboriginals in Canada today is due in part to this history of oppression and control. In fact, many argue that this treatment continues to be exemplified in Canada's correctional system as it is considered to be an extension of the colonizing forces of the past (Faith, 2006, Sugar & Fox, 1990; TFFSW, 1990).

Given the over-representation of Aboriginal women in Canada who are federally sentenced, "the responsibility to fully resource meaningful choices for Aboriginal women must be mandated in a timely manner" (TFFSW, 1990, p. 17). Furthermore, the Task Force contends that control over the future of Aboriginal peoples, including those who are incarcerated, must rest with Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal women. Over the past fifteen years, the Correctional Service Canada (CSC) adopted some of the recommendations made by two major documents, *Creating Choices* and the *Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women in Kingston*, and implemented several changes in the management of federal corrections for women. In 2001, CSC also established a corporate priority to increase the safe and successful reintegration of Aboriginal offenders and distributed the *National Action Plan on Aboriginal Corrections* written by the Aboriginal Issues Branch (AIB). In accordance with the action plan, CSC committed itself to "create

partnerships and strategies that enhance the safe, timely reintegration of Aboriginal offenders” (AIB, p. 2). Specific changes included the development of the Okimaw Ohci Aboriginal Healing Lodge on the Nekaneet First Nations reserve in Saskatchewan, enhanced support for the *Native Sisterhood*, the *Elder* receiving the same stature as the chaplain, and the establishment of the *Aboriginal Liaison Officer*.

The Native Sisterhood (also referred to as the Sisterhood) is a cultural group comprised of FSW who helped maintain a distinct Aboriginal identity and exercise the women’s right to practice Aboriginal cultures and traditions (Native Sisterhood Constitution, 2003). According to Doris, one of the founding members of the Sisterhood, the Sisterhood began in 1979 at the Prison for Women (P4W) in Kingston, Ontario. The Sisterhood was formed for Aboriginal women in federal prison to come together and fight for Sweat Lodges, Spiritual Fasts, other ceremonies, and the use of medicines. As Doris stated:

The women weren't even allowed like medicines even, so when we started the Native Sisterhood we started fighting for that, you know, to be allowed to practice our Native ways. Like we weren't, when I went there we had no medicines or anything. Women didn't even know what they were.

Unlike current CSC policy where the Native Elder is considered CSC staff, the funding for the Elder at P4W was provided by the Native Women's Association of Canada. When P4W closed, the Native Sisterhood did not necessarily carry over to the other institutions that opened across Canada. According to Doris, the group had to be re-formed and was initially met with some resistance from prison authorities:

Same thing here [at Grand Valley Institution], when we first came here too, they had nothing here for me. There was Native women [sic] but there was not even a Native Sisterhood here. They never even had meetings... you know, before we got together, a few of us, we sat in the chapel and spirituality centre

to you know, to organize our first meeting...and the OIC [officer in charge] came down and he said we can't just have meetings like that. You know, it doesn't go like that here you know? So we had to write a constitution and then we had to run it by the warden and we had an executive committee so it was good and so finally it got finalized and we were allowed to have our meetings and stuff.

Currently, the membership of the Sisterhood consists of full members, women who are registered status-Indian, Inuit, and Metis, and Honorary members, women who may or may not have Aboriginal ancestry (Native Sisterhood Constitution, 2003). Sisterhood meetings are scheduled to occur every Monday from 6:00 to 8:00 pm. They generally open with smudging (an Aboriginal tradition which involves the burning of sweetgrass, sage and/or cedar and is considered as a purification ceremony that invites health into a person's life) and a prayer. Following the presentation of official business by the executive and discussion of the material by the members, the meeting generally proceeds to a Sharing/Talking Circle (where, if so desired, each members uses the eagle feather to talk about how they are feeling and what is going on in their lives) or a Drum Circle (where members drum and sing songs).

Much like the chaplains in Canada's correctional facilities, Elders provide spiritual services to Aboriginal offenders, and offer counselling, guidance and leadership (CSC, 2006a; Edwards, 1995). Aboriginal Liaisons help to ensure that the unique needs of Aboriginal peoples who are incarcerated are met by providing advice to case management staff at CSC, facilitating programs, and establishing and maintaining contact with Aboriginal communities (CSC, 2006a; Edwards, 1995). Most experiences of healing for Aboriginal FSW have been outside the conventional prison treatment programs, namely activities of the Sisterhood, bonds formed with other women in prison and support of community members

(Monture-Angus, 2000; TFFSW, 1990). According to a study by Thibault (2001), participation in cultural activities reveals a strong correlation with a declining recidivism rate for Aboriginal male offenders. The study also suggests that the support of an Elder and participation in spiritual activities have a positive impact on reintegration. However, while the success of Elders has been recognized, the influence of Elders on individual inmates and their personal experiences have yet to be examined (AIB, 2001). This study sought to investigate the impact of the Sisterhood on FSW's rehabilitation and healing, particularly in terms of its activities (i.e., Sweat Lodge Ceremonies, Pow Wows, etc.), the relationships formed between the women and Elders, and the connections developed with members of the outside community.

The AIB (2001) also identified the need for research to document the impact of existing and new initiatives for Aboriginal offenders. Furthermore, there is even less research on Aboriginal female offenders, particularly in terms of their experiences of rehabilitation, healing and reintegration. The majority of criminological research has focused on male offenders, as opposed to female offenders (Bosworth, Campbell, Demby, Seth, & Santos, 2005; Covington, 1988; Smart 1995), with much less attention to Aboriginal female offenders. This research initiative endeavoured to help bridge this gap and contribute to the knowledge used to facilitate a meaningful pathway to healing and integration into society for Aboriginal FSW.

The purpose of this study was to examine major Aboriginal events and traditions organized during the incarceration of FSW and the effects the women believed these events had on their identity development, healing, and rehabilitation. The study predominantly focused on, though was not limited to, events organized by the Native Sisterhood such as the Annual Pow Wow, Aboriginal Day, and Sweat Lodge ceremonies.

Setting the Stage

A contributing factor to Aboriginal female offenders' subjugation paramount to this study was recognizing the potential for research to be an oppressive force in the lives of these women. According to Ladson-Billings (2000), "the ahistorical and acontextual nature of much law and other 'science' render the voices of the dispossessed and the marginalized group members mute" (p. 265). Thus, it was important to understand the history of Aboriginal female offenders and to understand their experiences in the context of their gender and race. The epistemological roots of this research were grounded in critical theory. In addition to considerations of historical contexts, critical theory requires the analysis of hegemonic structures in society, such as the correctional system.

For Aboriginal women, experiences within correctional facilities involve a process of revictimization. On many occasions, offenders do not receive culturally appropriate rehabilitation and return home without having resolved the issues that caused the offence to occur (CPVAW, 1993). Moreover, as expressed by CPVAW, "many Aboriginal women do not perceive the Canadian justice system as a means of protecting themselves, their children or their rights...Aboriginal women report the batterer is often better protected and defended in the courtroom than the victim" (p. 147). With 90% of Aboriginal female offenders who have been physically abused and 61% sexually abused (TFFSW, 1990), they have likely experienced the injustice of the justice system, first as victims of abuse and now as offenders. According to Radosh (2002), female offenders have been victimized through multiple stages of patriarchy. She specifically states that, "structure, oppression, economic exploitation, and marginalized social opportunity explain almost all of women's crime" (p. 303). Consequently, experiences of victimization from abuse, and then experiences of revictimization in the prison system contribute to perpetuating feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability (Bill, 1998).

Chapter 2 is dedicated to presenting the evolution of Corrections for Women in Canada and an historical overview of the treatment of Canada's Aboriginal peoples, with special attention directed towards Aboriginal women. Chapter 3 consists of a review of the literature that is centred around feminist perspectives of incarcerated women and a critical reflection on leisure and its potential to be both a context of social control and resistance. Finally, Chapter 4 presents critical theory as the epistemological basis of this study and discusses how four methodologies, action research, feminist inquiry, critical race theory and creative analytic practice, informed the research process.

Conceptualization of Race

Race, in this study, was conceptualized as a social construct that permeates all aspects of life. This definition of race was largely based on race defined by critical race theorists. Duncan's (2002) discussion of race implies that race is a central feature in social and economic organization and that it is part of a hierarchical structure that defines dominant and subjugated positions in society. According to many critical race theory (CRT) researchers, any examination of race and racism begins with the basic assumption that those in power, namely Whites (generally male), have created a system of human domination that enables them to achieve and maintain power over other racial groups (Singer, 2005). In short, racism is ingrained in everyday society. Furthermore, this study also recognized that a person's identity is not based solely on the social construction of race, but is multidimensional and intersects with various experiences such as class and gender. Thus, it was assumed that gender and race permeate all aspects of lived experiences and conceptualizations of personal and collective identities.

My Walk on the Red Road

The “Red Road” was first referenced in this study by Shannon, one of the Aboriginal FSW. The phrase is well-known in the Aboriginal community and has a variety of meanings. In this particular study it came to represent experiencing and living out an Aboriginal way of life— something that many Aboriginal FSW had never encountered prior to their incarceration. The term was used during informal conversations and also during the formal interview. As we discussed Shannon’s experiences of Aboriginal culture and traditions she stated, “*I do choose to walk the Red Road*”. As discussed in Chapters Five and Six, the women’s journey along the Red Road, both individually and collectively re-created the meaning of *being Aboriginal*. And, as it is further discussed in Chapter Six, it is hoped that the creation and re-creation of the Red Road for Aboriginal women will continue for the rest of their lives. As Freire (2006a) contends, knowledge and education are consistently remade in the process of being and becoming.

I am a Canadian-born Chinese woman who grew up in an upper-middle class family. I grew up in a traditional nuclear family: Two loving parents, an older sister, whom I adored, and a dog named Dexter. As one volunteer with a recreation program that I interviewed for a study commented, “*People who don’t even think about [individuals in prison] are basically like ostriches who put their head in the sand*” (Yuen, Thompson, & Pedlar, 2006). I was an ostrich. Life was easier not knowing. However, as I became more entrenched with the women in the prison and with those who work with the women, such as my advisor, the coordinator of a program called Stride, and the Native Elder at the prison, I found that I could no longer ignore the marginalized and oppressed histories of incarcerated women, and most particularly, Aboriginal women.

The development of this research project was inspired by the Aboriginal women I have come to know in Grand Valley Institution (GVI), one of six women’s federal

penitentiaries in Canada. For three and a half years, I went to the prison once a week to participate in recreation and leisure activities organized by a non-profit organization called Community Justice Initiatives. For two hours every Tuesday night, women from the community and women in GVI come together through a program called Stride Night, whose goal is to promote the natural development of meaningful relationships between women in the community and women in GVI (Yuen, et al., 2006). During the first year, my involvement in Stride Night consisted of being a research assistant and volunteer. During my second year, I was officially “just” a volunteer, though I continued to observe and reflect upon my experiences from an academic perspective. Nonetheless, as indicated by Stride Night participants, a woman’s “official” position in the program is of little concern; at Stride Night everyone is simply human (Yuen, et al.). It is through this experience that the incarcerated women at GVI became known to me as “women” and I shall continue referring to them as women throughout this study.

Through Stride Night I came to know a woman, Joanne, who spoke passionately about the Sisterhood. She invited me out to the group’s Sweat Lodge ceremonies (referred to as Sweats) and Sharing Circles and Drum Circles. Sweats occurred once a month and Sisterhood meetings occurred once a week. Over the course of two and a half years I attended almost every Sweat, Sisterhood meeting, Annual Pow Wow, and Aboriginal Day celebration. Based on my initial interactions with the Sisterhood, I realized that there was something meaningful and powerful about the women’s involvement with these cultural experiences, particularly with respect to the women’s healing. Before I even began participating in the Sisterhood activities I was curious about its impact. The following is an excerpt from my reflexive journal (March 2, 2005), which documented one of the first times I was really struck by the possibility that Aboriginal traditions reflected through the Sisterhood (and other experiences) could be making some impact on the women during their imprisonment:

Tonight Joanne revealed her true feelings about one of the women in the Sisterhood. I questioned how it was possible to disclose and share with members of the Sisterhood during the Sharing Circles and Sweats when there were people she had such contempt for. Joanne responded with something to the effect that women have their issues outside the Sisterhood, but you leave it on the outside. You have to be respectful of others during these ceremonies. Leslie [another FSW] joined in halfway through this conversation. After I told her we were talking about the Sisterhood, she replied with much enthusiasm that it was refreshing. *Refreshing*, that's an adjective rarely heard to describe a prison experience.

My advisor knew that I had a keen interest in cultural traditions and ceremonies and gently encouraged me to consider Aboriginal incarcerated women for my research dissertation. At that time I was still quite uncomfortable with the idea of working so closely with incarcerated women. However, my experiences with Aboriginal traditions in GVI continued and with the encouragement of my Advisor and the support of the Sisterhood, I decided to explore the women's experiences with Aboriginal cultures in GVI and examine the impact of these experiences on their healing and rehabilitation. Hence the origins of the purpose of this study.

I began this journey as an observer who was curious to understand the lives of incarcerated women. Essentially, I saw myself as a constructivist aiming to first understand and then partake in the dynamic construction of knowledge with the women. However, as much as I resisted, I found myself evolving into a critical theorist. Critique and transformation have become the cornerstones of my research. Two underlying realities that I could no longer ignore were the marginalized status of Aboriginal women, which stems from

a history of control and assimilation, and the oppressive structure inherent within incarceration.

The initial purpose of my involvement with FSW was to fulfill my responsibilities as a research assistant. Little did I know that these women would become the reason and motivating factor behind my doctoral dissertation. As I reflect over these past three and a half years, I realize that I have changed as a researcher and as a person. The following presents this transition through an analysis of my reflexive journal. This analysis occurred through a reflexive practice which resulted in the creation of poem. Reflexivity is described by Macbeth (2001) as a “deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself” (p. 35). Reflexivity, as a part of the methodological process, acknowledges that researchers are a part of the social phenomenon they are seeking to understand (Schwandt, 2001). According to Dupuis (1999), reflexivity involves the conscious and deliberate inclusion of the self. Further discussion on reflexivity is presented in Chapter Four, the chapter on the methodology used for this study.

Writing can be used as a method of inquiry through discovery and analysis (Richardson, 2000). My reflexive journal served as a method of discovery as I reflected upon my personal characteristics and experiences, and how they influenced the research. Specifically, my reflexive journal provided the opportunity for me to look back at my experiences and consider how my emotions have impacted my interactions with the women and the way in which I have approached the research. It also served as an outlet for venting my frustrations and emotions. Finally, my reflexive journal also helped me *work in the hyphen* between myself and others. According to Fine (1994) working in the hyphen requires researchers to question their relationship with the contexts they study and with their informants. Researchers do not encompass neutral non-gendered, race-less, class-less roles.

Rather, working in the hyphens requires the consideration of how personal characteristics, perspectives and histories of the investigator affect the research process.

Reflexivity begins with a relatively formal exercise, most often portrayed through writing representations, such as a reflexive journal. Macbeth (2001) argues that the reflexive practice requires continuous interrogation and monitoring. In other words, the reflexive exercise involves “the disruption of the text itself by various devices and experiments in textual display” (Macbeth, p. 43). Furthermore, reflexivity is the inquiry into our unreflected knowledge and practices; it brings the unsettled into view (Macbeth). Reflexivity can be a rather uncomfortable process and discussing it with others can even be more uncomfortable. In an effort to continue my reflexive practice and to overcome my discomfort, I created a poem that took excerpts from my reflexive journal to reflect my transformation and portray some of the tensions I experienced throughout the research process.

Ethnographers have been successful in using poems as a method of representation and presentation of the research findings. Even more specifically, researchers have taken words and sentences from participant transcripts to articulate the experiences of research participants (Gillies, 2007; Poindexter, 2002; Whitney, 2004). However, rather than representing the experiences of others, this poem represents my own. The poem, titled *Kicking and Screaming*, was constructed from my reflexive journal, which consisted of approximately 120 pages of my thoughts and emotions written over the course of three years. My journal entries were primarily about my interactions with incarcerated women, but also included my reactions to the literature, conferences, movies, newspaper articles, and conversations with colleagues, professors, friends and family. I began by re-reading my journal entries and pulling out what I thought were pivotal moments. Following this procedure I pulled out key sentences that best represented these experiences and shortened them or broke them into two lines. These pivotal moments were grouped into stanzas that

represent my journey, from resistance, to understanding and gaining an appreciation for the women's experiences, to emotional and intense experiences in the Sweat Lodge, to turmoil and eventually composure as an advocate and critical theorist.

This poem represents my transformation, from constructivist to critical theorist; first kicking and screaming against the very thought of working with FSW for my dissertation, and eventually kicking and screaming *with* incarcerated women and *for* incarcerated women. Important individuals that require an introduction include Norma Geauvreau, the Native Elder at the prison, Dr. Alison Pedlar, my dedicated advisor, and of course, the Aboriginal FSW. My interactions occurred with over twenty woman, but they have been integrated into a collective by an all encompassing *she*.

Kicking and Screaming

A woman asked me:
How did you feel coming in here for the first time?
I was afraid I wouldn't fit in
We might be criminals, but we are nice!
She'd been in prison 7 years
We found the common bond of Saskatchewan
I've become so comfortable
I sometimes forget that I'm in a prison
Is there a danger in becoming too comfortable?
I've got this idea for my dissertation
It'll be too hard

When you're on the inside, you don't feel like much
She's having a tough time on the outside
She's was only in here 2 years
She's lived with foster care until the age of eight
She was adopted by White parents
She's been in federal corrections twice
She wants to find out who she is
Explore her Native side.

The Sweat Lodge is a safe place
You're in the womb
A breath a warm air filled with life and love
She wouldn't stop crying
Soothing songs so that she could feel safe
We are not here to judge
It's not about suffering

It's about healing

“A woman doused another woman
in gasoline and set her on fire¹”
I know this woman

Two members of the Sisterhood got put in segregation
Another got transferred to another institution for her own safety
Norma said that this always happens to *our people*
It's happened again
Another *Sister* involved in an altercation
She's back in prison
They keep coming back
I'm very much affected by my emotions
The pain of the women
Alison says I should try to be more analytical
Less emotional
How do you just take yourself out?

I was asked to do the opening prayer
That sure took me by surprise
You're not a Rat, you're a pretty Cool Chick
We were in the Sweat Lodge
I was exhausted
I had to lie down
There was no place to place my head but on her lap
She began to stroke my hair
A comforting gesture

There's no turning back
I've moved over to a more political and critical look at leisure
From expression to resistance
An incident happened
I need to write an observation report
I was motivated to give the lecture
It was another opportunity to get it out there
A foreign and unacknowledged part of their Canadian heritage

*Everyday life is about who we are as Native people
We have to learn what that means for us and
How that fits in with the rest of the world
Someday I'm coming home*

¹ (Canadian Press, 2006)

A Collaborative Research Approach

Researchers such as Shaw (2000), Kelly (2000) and Goodale (2002) contend that leisure studies, which has been predominantly focused on the individual, should shift towards a more socially relevant research. Specifically, they encourage leisure researchers to direct their “attention outwards— towards pressing social needs, issues and concerns— rather than always looking inwards with a narrow focus on leisure” (Shaw, 2000, p. 150). In response to these comments, my desire was to first understand the needs of Aboriginal FSW, and second, to examine how cultural activities and experiences impact these needs. I pursued this research in full collaboration with the Aboriginal women both in GVI and out in the community. This plan of action was also in accordance with the suggestion of TTFSW (1990) to place control of Corrections for Aboriginal women with Aboriginal women.

Because of my limited understanding of Aboriginal cultures and experiences of FSW, the development of this study from its inception was done in collaboration with members of the Native Sisterhood in GVI, along with the Native Elder at GVI and Wanda². The development of this research was based on a journey of discovery, which was supported by these women. These relationships helped me develop a greater understanding of the issues and needs that these Aboriginal women face. My relationships with certain members of the Sisterhood have been particularly significant to the study. These women were Joanne, who first introduced me to the Sisterhood and invited me to their Sharing/Drum Circles and Sweats; Shannon, who stressed the importance of the holistic perspective of Aboriginal cultures, which is central in understanding Aboriginal cultures and experiences, and directed me towards the book, *The Dispossessed, Life and Death in Native Canada* by York (1990); Katie and Deb. Countless conversations with these women have helped ground the essence of

² I met Wanda Whitebird two and a half years ago at my first Sweat in GVI. She works for 2 Spirits in Toronto, Ontario and comes to the prison once a month to lead the Sweats. 2 Spirits is a non-profit organization whose vision is to create a space where Aboriginal gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people (referred to Two-

this research in the history and lives of Aboriginal women. These conversations were rooted in trust and openness and were facilitated by a relationship that took months of nurturing and commitment by all.

My long-term involvement at GVI also enabled me to develop trusting relationships with many of the primary workers (guards) and other employees at the institution. This kind of relationship was critical in allowing me relative freedom in navigating the rules and regulations of the prison so that I could maintain and further develop my relationship with the women on a regular basis. In one instance, upon my arrival at the prison I was told by the primary worker at the front gate that my security clearance had expired. However, he said he recognized me and would allow me access into the institution. The following week, I called the institution in advance to check the status of my clearance. They informed me that my security clearance was still not processed, but once again, they knew who I was and told me they would allow me access into the prison (reflexive journal, May 14, 2007). Most of the CSC staff were supportive of my involvement with the women. However, there were a few primary workers that appeared to feel my presence was disruptive to the regulatory nature of the prison. One day a primary worker told me, with much authority, that it was very unusual for a volunteer to have so much freedom in the compound and that makes it hard for them to do their job (reflexive journal, June 21, 2007). However, even with a few of the primary workers who appeared wary of my presence in the prison, more often than not, the staff at GVI were supportive of my research and the way in which I interacted with the women.

I originally entered this research with great apprehension. I felt as though I was alone, jumping into a sea of murky waters. However, eventually, with great excitement, I found myself headed down a path of the unknown, guided by a group of women that I came to

Spirited people in the Native tradition) can grow and come together as a community, honour their past and build a future (2 Spirits, 2005).

know and respect for their quest to find a part of themselves that had been denied from a complex history of oppression and control.

Chapter 2 – An Historical Overview

Federal Corrections for Women in Canada

Female offenders who are under federal jurisdiction in Canada have been given a sentence of two years or more. Women who receive a sentence of two years less one day are housed in provincial penitentiaries. Historically, correctional strategies for women were largely based on a White male model of management (TTFSW, 1990). Marcus-Mendoza, Klein-Saffran and Lutze (1998) posit that theories of male criminality are based on social control and power control. That is, the criminal justice system is based on the understanding that the strength of social bonds, a person's belief in societal rules, and power dynamics in a person's life determine an individual's criminal behaviour. Indeed, as Foucault (1995) implies, incarceration acts as a mechanism which controls a person's behaviour by assigning a place of residence and forbidding others; it avoids the development of groups and seeks to gain power by exercising a constant pressure to conform to a certain model of behaviour. Furthermore, as noted by McCorkel (2003), the penal system is inherently male. The social construction of the criminal evokes images of a male whose offences are motivated by power and economics. In the same regard, the word "inmate" typically produces an image of a hardened, violent man (Bruns & Lesko, 1999). Foucault refers to the prisoner as male and does not differentiate between the experiences of male and female offenders. He also describes the prison as a system that aims to be efficient and productive; two concepts which Gilligan (1982) refers to as primarily male-notions of being. Consequently, historically the normative approach of women's corrections addressed the criminality of men as opposed to women and reinforced a system of domination and control by its focus on security and restriction.

Like male offenders, female offenders typically have low levels of formal education, few job skills, are under- or unemployed and are disproportionately from minority groups.

However, research indicates that women's pathways to crime differ from men's and their needs for rehabilitation are inherently different (Bloom, 1999; Bloom & Covington, 1998; Boritch, 2001; Haywood, Kravitz, Goldman, & Freeman, 2000). According to Marcus-Mendoza and his colleagues (1998), most women do not commit crimes to gain control and power. Rather, they suggest that women commit crimes as a result of their oppression and experiences of victimization. Women generally commit crimes to support their relationships and feed their families, while others commit crime as an expression of the pain they have experienced. Likewise, Bloom (1999) suggests that female offenders are less likely to commit violent offences and more likely to be convicted of crimes involving drugs or property. She also contends that these crimes are predominantly motivated by poverty or dependency on alcohol or drugs. The main difference in the social profile between male and female offenders is that there is a greater presence of child dependents among women (Steffensmeier & Allan, 2004). Female offenders are also argued to have more psychiatric disorders than males. Accordingly, a criminological and psychiatric survey of males and females serving a prison sentence conducted by Maden, Swinton and Gunn (1994) found that women outnumbered men in all diagnostic categories (i.e., deliberate self-harm, levels of anxiety, personality disorders). Bloom and Covington (1998) contend that psychiatric disorders along with a significant amount of substance abuse may be consequences of the trauma experienced from physical and/or sexual abuse.

Indeed, female offenders' life histories and issues are complex and intertwined. Boritch (2001) indicates that "many of these problems overlap, such that women who have been physically or sexually abused are also likely to have substance abuse problems, low educational levels...physical and mental health problems, and little community support" (p. 225). In the same regard, Ritchie (2001) suggests that gender, ethnic identity, and economic status converge to make the situations of incarcerated women very complex. As will be

further discussed in Chapter 3, female offenders have unique needs that are distinct from those of males.

Creating Choices and The Arbour Report

Incarceration for FSW in Canada has been undergoing some major changes over the past decade. Prior to the year 2000, P4W in Kingston, Ontario was the only federal prison for women in Canada. This prison was built in 1934 and housed women classified under minimum, medium and maximum security. However, all women served their sentence under maximum security regardless of actual security classification (Boritch, 2001). Over the next century numerous government reports called for the closure of P4W due to the inferior conditions of the building and the geographic dislocation experienced by the majority of the women (Boritch). In 1981, the Human Rights Commission of Canada concluded that FSW were discriminated against on the basis of sex. Virtually all programs, facilities and treatment of FSW were inferior to men (Moffat, 1991)

In the 1990's a growing awareness of problems related to Canada's incarceration system for female offenders led to the publication of *Creating Choices* and the *Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women in Kingston*, which is commonly referred to as the Arbour Report. *Creating Choices* was produced by a Task Force in 1990, which was made up of a wide variety of community and government groups, such as the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, CSC, and Aboriginal women. The report essentially recommended a new system of incarceration that fostered the empowerment of FSW to make meaningful choices in order that they may live with dignity and respect (TFFSW, 1990). Specifically, the Task Force emphasized that the system of incarceration at P4W focused too much on security and did not provide adequate programming for incarcerated women. Furthermore, they acknowledged that FSW were isolated from their

families; that the needs of Aboriginal women and other women from ethnic minorities were not being met; and that incarceration was not promoting rehabilitation.

The Arbour Report, lead by the Honourable Louise Arbour, was commissioned by the Governor General on the recommendation of the Solicitor General. The purpose of the report was to investigate the events leading up to and following an incident at P4W on April 26, 1994, that involved eight women in the segregation unit and the male Institutional Emergency Response Team (IERT) who conducted cell extractions and strip searches. On the evening of April 26, 1994, the Warden of P4W called for the IERT to restore order and control after a series of disruptions in the segregation unit occurred between April 22 and 26, 1994.³ Customary procedure requires that cell extractions and strip searches be video-taped for training purposes and to have a record from which to respond to any allegations of impropriety by the IERT (Arbour, 1996). Subsequently, substantial extracts of this video were shown on the CBC program, *Fifth Estate*. Sadly, as expressed by Arbour in the preface of her report, until the public viewing of the videotape, CSC had essentially closed the book on events preceding and following the cell extractions and strip searches conducted by the IERT on April 26, 1994.

Major recommendations of the Arbour Report called for the position of Deputy Commissioner for Women be created within CSC and that CSC recognize the different circumstances and needs of women, particularly with respect to, though not limited to childcare. With regard to Aboriginal women, recommendations included: Access to the Healing Lodge be made available to all women regardless of their security level;

³ Emergency strip searches are only ordered when a staff member believes on reasonable grounds that an inmate is carrying contraband or evidence related to an offence and that a strip search is necessary to find the contraband or evidence; or that the delay in the authorization of a strip search conducted by a staff member of the same sex will result in danger to human life or safety, or that the contraband or evidence will be destroyed (Arbour, 1996). Incidentally, as Arbour concludes, while the collective behaviour of the women in segregation was highly disruptive, it is inconceivable that nothing, other than to call for the IERT, could have been done to bring the situation under control.

consideration be given for the development of a Healing Lodge in Eastern Canada; access to Elders be formalized and facilitated; and culturally relevant programs be made available.

In response to the recommendations of *Creating Choices* and the Arbour Report, CSC has been moving from a model of punishment to a model of rehabilitation and reintegration for FSW over the past decade. On July 6, 2000, P4W closed and a new era of management began and creating meaningful choices for FSW became the main thrust of CSC's mandate for women's corrections. To date, six regional facilities have opened across Canada. Included in these regional facilities is a First Nations Healing Lodge in Saskatchewan in an effort to meet the needs of Aboriginal Women. The women in these regional facilities reside in community-style housing where they are responsible for cooking, cleaning and laundry. Ideally, this type of living environment, along with other recommendations made by the Task Force (1990) and Arbour (1996), will enable women to take control and responsibility of their lives.

The Five Guiding Principles of *Creating Choices*

The recommendations made in *Creating Choices* are based on five guiding principles: 1) Empowerment, 2) Meaningful and responsible choices, 3) Respect and dignity, 4) Supportive environment, and 5) Shared responsibility. These principles are discussed in the following paragraphs in relation to the histories and needs of FSW.

Empowerment

According to the Task Force (1990), the majority of FSW have a history of abuse. One-hundred and seventy out of the 203 women serving a federal sentence in 1989 were surveyed by the Task Force. They reported that 80% of women surveyed were abused; with 68% of those women reporting physical abuse and 54% reporting sexual abuse. The consequences of these experiences have left these women with low self-esteem and little belief that they can direct and control their lives (TFFSW). Low self-esteem reduces a

woman's ability to cope and increases self-destructive behaviour (TFFSW). In contrast, increased self-esteem can enhance the ability to accept and express responsibility for one's actions. Thus, *Creating Choices* suggests that the new model of management for FSW include programs that enhance self-esteem and create opportunities for women to gain control in their lives by having the ability to create and make meaningful decisions.

Meaningful and responsible choices

According to the Task Force (1990), histories of abuse have robbed FSW of the opportunity to make meaningful choices. As Cunningham and Baker (2004) suggest, victimization and abusive relationships are important features of the pathways that bring women into conflict with the law. Furthermore, the Task Force states dependency on drugs and alcohol have also contributed to the women's lack of opportunity for choice and that this substance abuse may be related to unhealthy coping strategies for stress and trauma. Sixty-nine percent of FSW reported that substance abuse has played a major role in their offence or their offending history (TFFSW). In response, *Creating Choices* suggests that gaining a sense of control requires meaningful options for responsible choices to be made and such options and choices can only exist within a flexible environment.

Respect and dignity

In addition to abusive relationships and dependency on drugs and alcohol, seemingly arbitrary prison rules and regulations have also lead to the sense of powerlessness for FSW (TFFSW). Those women who were consulted during the development of *Creating Choices* suggested that the lack of privacy, quiet and dignity have lead to feelings of hopelessness and lack of motivation. Furthermore, the women also felt deprived of their spiritual needs and opportunities to express their cultural identity, particularly for women from ethnic minorities. *Creating Choices* has been especially sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal women, which is crucial as Aboriginal women are disproportionately over-represented in Canadian women's

prisons (Sinclair & Boe, 2002; La Prairie, 1993). This third principle also fosters a mutuality of respect among prisoners and between prisoners and staff. As stated in the report, the principle is based on the observation that if people are treated with respect and dignity they will be more likely to act responsibly.

Supportive environment

Only four years after the opening of P4W the Archambault Commission of 1938 concluded that the prison should be closed due to the inferior conditions of the prison (Boritch, 2001). In subsequent years over a dozen other reports and inquiries were conducted and all but one of these reports recommended the closure of P4W due to serious limitations and inequities in the provision of services for FSW (Boritch). As documented by the Task Force (1990), the Maguire Report, which was published in 1977, stated that P4W was “unfit for bears, much less women” (p. 30). Furthermore, as indicated by Moffat (1991), a report of the Canadian Bar Association in 1981 argued that family and community separation was unreasonable and undermined the prospects for women’s successful reintegration. The TFFSW asserts that the environment for FSW in P4W was physically, psychologically and spiritually inadequate. In response, they recommend that CSC creates an environment that encourages the principles of empowerment, meaningful choices, and dignity and respect by focusing on a meaningful outcome. This change includes considerations for the architectural structure as well as the geographical, political, financial, psychological, and spiritual environment.

Shared responsibility

Within the correctional system choices for the women are limited. As the Task Force (1990) explains, “because the Correctional Service of Canada has legal obligations for federally sentenced women, responsibility for federal women is too narrowly assigned to correctional systems” (p. 111). Furthermore, successful rehabilitation requires women’s

integration back into their communities and opportunities to take responsibility in these communities (TFFSW). This final principle focuses on encouraging involvement of the greater community in the rehabilitation process for FSW. More specifically, *Creating Choices* suggests that the government at all three levels (municipal, provincial, and federal), CSC, voluntary sector services, businesses and community members take responsibility in fostering the interdependence and self-reliance of FSW.

In sum, *Creating Choices* reiterates the multiple reports of concern regarding the treatment of FSW over the past eighty years. Female offenders' histories of abuse and dependence on alcohol and drugs in addition to the inferior living conditions at P4W could no longer be ignored.

Initiatives for Aboriginal Federal Offenders

Along with the changes generated by *Creating Choices* major amendments were made in provisions for Aboriginal peoples who were federally incarcerated. These changes were issued in the *Commissioner's Directive 702: Aboriginal Programming* and *Sections 81 and 84* in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. In 1995, CSC re-released the Commissioner's Directive on Aboriginal programming. This revised policy helps ensure that Aboriginals within Canada's correctional system can practice their traditions and culture, recognizing that these practices could contribute to healing, and that Aboriginal offenders have the right to maintain and develop their distinct identities (CSC, 1995). The Commissioner's Directive ensures access to a Native Elder, who has the same rights and privileges as a Chaplain, and allows the women to legally take part in traditional ceremonies such as Drum Circles, Sweat Lodges and use cedar, sage, tobacco, and sweet grass and ceremonial pipes (CSC).

CSC also has an Aboriginal community reintegration program governed under the legislation commonly referred to as *Section 81* and *Section 84*. Section 81 allows for the

transfer of an offender to the custody and care of an Aboriginal community (Department of Justice, 1992). This legislation implies that FSW can be transferred to an urban or rural facility designed for Aboriginal offenders. Section 84 allows for an individual to be released on parole in an Aboriginal community and an opportunity for the community to propose a plan for the inmate's release and integration.

Issues, such as the extensive history of abuse and trauma of most FSW and the unique needs of Aboriginal peoples have been acknowledged by CSC as they move towards a new model of management by attempting to create an environment that upholds the five principles of *Creating Choices*. However, while the changes implemented by CSC have been a positive beginning and the recommendations of *Creating Choices* have minimized the prison's effect of social control, these changes have not significantly challenged the oppressive hegemony of surveillance and discipline that exists in the penal system.

Further, it has been argued that federal corrections for women has fallen substantially short of the recommendations made in *Creating Choices* and the *Arbour Report* (Faith, 2006). According to comments made by Arbour to the Justice Reporter of the *Globe and Mail* (Markin, 2006), ten years later, the prison system is still failing; the discrimination against women continues and there has been little done to address the disproportionate incarceration of Aboriginal women. The very core of imprisonment is based upon a system of power, control and dominance (Foucault, 1995), which then undermines the possibility for the principles of *Creating Choices* to realize their full potential. Thus, even though the changes that have been made are positive steps in the evolution of women's corrections, oppression through alienation, discipline and surveillance remains.

Canada's Aboriginal Peoples⁴

According to a report from the United Nations (UN) on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indigenous people (Stavenhagen, 2005), Canada would place 48th out of 174 countries if the country were judged solely on the economic and social well-being of First Nations people; a significant drop from its usual top ten ranking on the UN's human development index (CBC News, 2005). For some of the Canadian Aboriginal population, basic physiological needs such as running water are not met. In 1990, one third of houses on Indian reserves had no running water, and more than half of the houses had no central heating (York, 1990). In 2005, fifteen years later, there was a slight improvement when 20% of the Native population was reported to have inadequate water and sewer systems (Stavenhagen, 2005). The vicious cycle of poverty for Aboriginals persists as the average income of Aboriginal families is about half the national average (Menzies, 1999). Consequently, many Aboriginal families are second, third and even fourth generation "welfare families" (CPVAW, 1993). Aboriginals rate lower than the general Canadian population on all educational attainment indicators, which include secondary school completion rates, postsecondary education admissions and completion of university degrees (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2005). On average, non-Aboriginals live 6.4 years longer than Aboriginals (Stavenhagen, 2005). In sum, as reported by Stavenhagen,

Poverty, infant mortality, unemployment, morbidity, suicide, criminal detention, children on welfare, women victims of abuse, child prostitution, are all much higher among Aboriginal people than any other sector of Canadian society, whereas educational attainment, health standards, housing conditions,

⁴ The term *Aboriginal* was used in accordance with others such as Dell &Boe (2000) and Voyageur (1998) who use Aboriginal as an all encompassing term to include people who identify themselves as status-Indians, Metis, non-status Indians, or Inuit. Based on various government reports, *Native* and more recently *First Nations* appear to be official terms that have replaced *Indian*. Throughout the study, I generally used the term Aboriginal; however, First Nations and Indian were also used, particularly when referring to this population in a

family income, access to economic opportunity and social services are generally lower (p. 2).

Aboriginal women are positioned even further on the fringes of Canada's social structure. These women are at the lowest income levels of the Canadian population (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2006). A report by Amnesty International (2004) titled, *Stolen Sisters: A Human Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada* documented the pervasiveness of violence against Canada's Aboriginal women. Indeed, "Aboriginal women are five times more likely to experience a violent death than any other Canadian women" (Stavenhagen, 2005, p. 15).

The marginalized position of Aboriginals living in Canada today lies in a legacy of colonialism. Aboriginal scholar, Monture-Angus (2000), stresses that colonization is significantly responsible for the drastic situation facing Aboriginal communities. Over five hundred years of European settlement is painfully and tragically represented in overwhelmingly high rates of suicide, substance abuse, violence, and incarceration of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Menzies (1999) contends that this structure of inequality is directly connected to the processes of colonization and government policies. For example, individuals with registered Indian status were not allowed to vote until 1960, almost half a century after the first government election in which women were allowed to vote in 1912. Another piece of legislation that had, and continues to have, a profound effect on the lives of Aboriginals is the Indian Act. The following paragraphs discuss this Act and its role in the disenfranchisement of Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

political reference (i.e., Indian reserve, Indian Status). The Aboriginal people I met along the way have referred to themselves using all four terms.

Indian Act

The Indian Act of 1876 is argued to be the Canadian government's most effective tool in the annihilation of Aboriginal cultures and it left in its wake a path of cultural and social destruction (CPVAW, 1993; York, 1990). According to Razack (1998), understanding the violence that currently exists in many Aboriginal communities begins with understanding the violence of colonization, which ultimately destroyed Aboriginal peoples' sense of being by minimizing their sense of self, family, and community. Many have argued that the implementation of the Indian Act was used as a vicious mechanism of social control (Hedican, 1995; York). The Indian Act has been described as a vehicle, whose effect in many ways severely weakened the Native population. It has been further argued that the Indian Act had an overt agenda to eradicate the Native population (CPVAW; Lawrence, 2004; York). Moreover, as Lawrence (2004) contends, the Indian Act can be understood as a regime of regulation that shaped and continues to shape Native identity and has permeated the ways in which Native people understand their own identities. She argues that the Indian Act is inherently dehumanizing as it regulates identity by a largely biological standard of "Indianness" and ignores Indigenous ways of evaluating who was a member or citizen of a community. Many Aboriginal peoples, particularly those who live in urban centres and those who define themselves as being mixed Native and non-Native heritage, have difficulty expressing any pride in their Aboriginal identity. According to Lawrence (p. xv-xvi),

The reasons are myriad and complex. Some were abjured to be silent about their identity as children, for their own protection in the face of racism, while others were told nothing about their heritage to make it easier for them to assimilate into white identity. Some individuals come from families so disintegrated by alcohol and cycles of abuse that Nativeness has become too associated with pain and shame to be discussed.

Such experiences can be directly related to the Indian Act, which continues to silence, isolate, and alienate Aboriginal peoples today. Policies within this Act include the establishment of residential schools, the massive removal of Aboriginal children from their communities, the loss of Native status for Aboriginal women upon marriage to a non-Native man, and the abolition of spiritual practices and gatherings, such as the Pow Wows and Sweat Lodges. The following sections explore these policies in more detail.

The Loss of Social Order

In 1884, the Indian Act was amended to prohibit potlatches, which are Aboriginal ceremonies native to the west coast of Canada⁵ (Furniss, 1995). Shortly thereafter, in 1895, the government made it illegal for any sort of festival, dance or ceremony that included the giving away of money or goods, or the wounding of humans and/or animals (Blackhouse, 1999). Violations of this law would generally result in a prison sentence from two to six months (Blackhouse).

Discriminatory practices directed towards Aboriginal peoples in the enactment of the law that made Aboriginal ceremonies illegal have been documented by scholars such as Blackhouse. Specifically, she recounts an event that took place in January 1903, when Wanduta, a Dakota Elder, was charged and sentenced to four months in Brandon Jail, Manitoba, for hosting a dance that involved the giving away of goods and horses. In 1902, this dance, the Grass Dance, was endorsed by a white man, Malcolm Turriff, who was a local businessman and a central organizer of the annual fair in Rapid City, Manitoba. When the Dakotas were considering Turriff's invitation to participate in Rapid City's Annual Fair, they expressed concern about the potential for persecution. In response, Turriff supposedly

⁵ The potlatch is a tradition of West Coast Natives. This ceremony can be understood as a political arena that helps to create social order by providing temporary agreement among members about relationships and relative positions of social hierarchy (Tollefson, 1995). The mutually accepted rules of a potlatch provide guidelines in which discussion and decisions could be made (Tollefson). The guests present serve as witnesses to validate and verify these social changes, and gifts are given as evidence of participation and agreement of the decisions made (Tollefson).

advised the Dakotas that if any individual was imprisoned, he would see to their release (Blackhouse). The Dakotas eventually decided to participate in the fair. The Grass Dance ceremony lasted three days, and on-lookers were charged fifty cents by Turner to see the dance. Following Wanduta's guilty verdict, Turriff wrote a letter to the Department of Indian Affairs to explain that "the Dakotas had merely given an 'exhibition of their national dance' for the benefit of those attending the Rapid City Annual Fair" (Blackhouse, p. 79). The Department of Indian Affairs made no attempts to conduct an investigation of Turriff's allegations, nor did they attempt to prosecute Turriff for his role in the Grass Dance. Wanduta was the only person ever charged in relation to the Rapid City Grass Dance. Blackhouse suggests that the authorities did not prosecute Turriff because of his race and because of his social status. She also suggests that the Department of Indian Affairs singled out Wanduta because of his prominent status within the Dakota community.

The abolition of spiritual practices and gatherings, such as Sun Dances, Grass Dances, Give-Away Dances, Pow Wows and Sweat Lodges, devastated social mechanisms which provided structure, order, and a sense of well-being for Aboriginals. While the distribution of goods was perceived as immoral, it was in fact used as an affirmation of kinship and furthered the prestige and status of certain households (Backhouse, 1999). Traditional ceremonies such as Pow Wows and Sweat Lodges can be understood as a political arena to maintain tribal relations and solidarity. As Backhouse explains, "Ceremonial practices were inextricably linked with the social, political, and economic life-blood of the community, and dances underscored the core of Aboriginal resistance to cultural assimilation" (p. 65). When traditional ceremonies were banned, Aboriginal peoples were essentially denied the spirit of coherence that kept their community together.

Aboriginal ceremonies are complex and include a web of cultural meanings that are created in a discursive and ongoing process (Valaskakis, 2005). According to Monture Angus

(1995), “it is impossible to capture the essence of traditional ways in a moment or on paper. It is a lifelong commitment to learn these ways” (p. 211). Valaskakis argues that most academics have failed to articulate the “affectivity, ideology and cultural identity...that links the social imaginaries and memoried histories rooted together in the outsider’s representations of Indianness and the insider’s experience of being Indian” (p.161). At a glance, Pow Wows may be simply viewed as an historical practice and artistic performance. However, Pow Wows were an important social practice that enabled participants to engage as active agents of cultural creation and express meaning in social action (Valaskakis). Pow Wows were held for commercial trade, the exchange of songs and dances, and discussions around medicines and spiritual theories (Cole, 1993). Such gatherings were used to generate a sense of cohesiveness with participants (Dyck, 1983). The Pow Wow is a community of celebration where civic membership is substantively enacted (Borgmann,1992). According to Valaskakis, this celebration of membership is not a revitalization but an awareness of cultural persistence. For Aboriginals, the Pow Wow is a cultural practice where they shape their identities as they remember the past and imagine their future.

The term “lodge” to Aboriginal peoples means the body (CPVAW, 1993). Sweat Lodges represent a return to the mother’s womb; a resting place and a safe place to find healing. Sweat Lodges can be understood as a coping mechanism that invokes the release of emotional pain and suffering, and a spiritual cleansing combined with an intense physical experience. The physical environment at Sweat is complete darkness, cramped quarters, and a heat so intense that it burns the skin. Eucalyptus is added to the water which is poured on the Grandfathers (rocks) and thus, the steam that rises runs through your nose down deep into your lungs. Every emotion is felt in the Lodge– from gut-wrenching sobs, to songs of courage, and lullabies of peace. As Ross (1992) describes his experience with Sweats,

Most striking was the fact that each successive physiological state had an impact on my psychological state, and the two seemed to join together into that I can only describe as a spiritual force...It was, in a strange way, victory over your own anxieties and fears achieved through...mental concentration...and personal re-dedication to the worth of all things (p. 177-178).

With the abolishment of Sweat Lodges, some Aboriginal peoples lost an essential coping mechanism and the capacity to heal. European missionaries viewed these Aboriginal traditions as savage, irrational, chaotic, and essentially a threat to social order, when in fact they served as a mechanism of order and structure.

For the purposes of this study Aboriginal ceremonies were examined from a leisure perspective. Specifically, Sweats, Pow Wows and other cultural traditions were examined as a space for reclaiming and maintaining Aboriginal culture and self-identity. Leisure, in this regard, was viewed as *focal practice* or a context for engagement with the community. As described by Arai and Pedlar (2003), “individuals belong to a multitude of communities formed around a variety of focal practices. This network of networks enables each of us to continually re-create ourselves in the context of community” (p. 199). Focal practices are “grounded in the underlying reality, and...are heir[s] to the immemorial traditions” (Borgmann, 1992, p. 122). It is in engaging in focal practices and “as a result of participation in these communities, [that] the social self emerges” (Arai & Pedlar, p.191),

Focal practices are particularly conducive to the development of shared meanings and thus significant in creating a sense of social connectedness and belonging (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). Focal practices have been argued to provide a center of orientation around which people can gather. As Borgmann (1992) argued, “People are not interested in the project of community building. It is the thing [the activities], its charms and traditions, that have

captivated their good will.” (p. 136). In this regard, focal practices contribute to communities of celebration (Borgman). In the same regard, Pieper (1952) states that, “to hold celebration means to affirm the basic meaningfulness of the universe and a sense of oneness with, of inclusion with it” (p. 43). In short, focal experiences enable individuals to move beyond self-interest to areas of shared meaning (Arai & Pedlar).

Furthermore, leisure was also considered a context for resistance and empowerment as may be experienced through the search for healing in Sweats and social cohesion in Pow Wows. Leisure can embody elements of freedom and self-determination (Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Shaw 1994). In the same regard, as Mair (2002/2003) argues, leisure can provide opportunities for political, economical, social and/or environmental discussions, which then has the potential to lead towards activism. Further discussion in Chapter Three considers the potential of leisure as a context for resistance, as well as control.

The Loss of Multiple Generations

Many Aboriginal children were assimilated into European culture as they were forced to reside in residential schools, taken into foster care and/or adopted by white families. According to Stavenhagen (2005), residential schools did the greatest damage, “[children] were forbidden to speak the only languages they know and taught to reject their homes, their heritage and, by extension, themselves, thus contributing to the political, cultural and economic decline of many Aboriginal communities and people” (p. 16). Residential schools were a part of the nation building process as “selfless-Christian duty and self-interested statecraft were the foundations of the residential school system”, which concomitantly marginalized Aboriginal communities (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996a, p. 335). For over a century, from 1867 to 1980, Aboriginal children were separated from their families and communities and forced to abandon their culture and adopt the values of the European colonists (CPVAW, 1993; Faith, 2006; York, 1990). Self and family images were

destroyed as children became indoctrinated into the ‘Canadian’ Christian religion (Haig-Brown, 1998; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples). The children were told people who did not go to church were going to hell. They were also told that their ceremonies were evil. One of the participants in a study by Haig-Brown describes her experiences at a residential school:

At the Indian residential school, we were not allowed to speak our language; we were not allowed to dance, sing, because they told us it was evil. It was evil for us to practice any of our cultural ways (p. 58).

Parents were often prevented from visiting their children in residential schools when a pass system was introduced in 1884 (CPVAW). Furthermore, as Lawrence (2004) suggests, the habit of silence imprinted on most survivors has inhibited the passing on of language, culture, and even information related to family histories. In 1948, the federal government began to move from the residential school system to the creation of a day school system. Arguments for this change continued to be based in the assimilation of Aboriginal peoples into white society. Specifically, it was believed that integration would increase the likelihood and accelerate the process of Aboriginal children and Aboriginal parents adopting non-Aboriginal culture (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples).

The Sixties Scoop is another mechanism used by the government that was arguably used to fundamentally restructure Aboriginal societies (Fournier & Crey, 1997). The Sixties Scoop is a term used to describe how thousands of Aboriginal children were sent to White middle-class couples in Canada and the United States (Fournier & Crey; York, 1990). Compared to the one percent of Aboriginal children comprising all legal wards in 1959, by the end of the 1960’s, 30% to 40% of all children in care were Aboriginal. As explained by Crey (1997),

For the first time in Canada, provincial social workers were exercising the jurisdiction given to them by the federal government to go into Indian homes on and off reserve and make judgments about what constituted proper care, according to non-native, middle-class values (p.30).

The accelerated removal of Aboriginal children from their homes began in the 1960's, but the removal of these children continued beyond that decade. According to Fournier and Crey, in the late 1970's one in four Aboriginal children would be separated from their family for all or part of their childhood. Crey continued by asserting that "poverty was the only reason many children were apprehended from otherwise caring aboriginal homes" (p. 30). The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (2006b), suggests that the Sixties Scoop underplayed the severe disruption of Aboriginal families caused by social, economic, and cultural changes. Rather than providing social services, such as family counselling and funded day-care facilities to Aboriginal families, services that were often provided for white families in crisis, most Aboriginal children were adopted out of their communities. These children would ultimately lose their cultural identity, their registered Indian-status, and often vanished without a trace (Fournier & Crey).

Multiple generations of Aboriginal families were devastated by the impact of the Sixties Scoop (Lawrence, 2004). In addition to experiences of physical, psychological and sexual abuse, which were not unusual for Aboriginal children who were placed in foster and adoptive families, families were separated and identities lost. Parents who lost their children turned to alcohol for comfort, and adopted Aboriginal children grew up to have children of their own, some of whom were also taken into custody (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Notably, there were many foster and adoptive families who did their best to nurture and raise the Aboriginal children who were entrusted into their care. However, as Fournier and Crey indicate,

The outcome of adoptions even by conscientious non-native parents were often disastrous, as the adoptee reached adolescence only to suffer the triply painful identity crisis of being adolescent, aboriginal and adopted...The adoptive family's attempts at supplying aboriginal culture – museums, films and beading class – were 'too superficial' to bolster their adopted children's low self-esteem. Aboriginal adoptees had to suffer systemic racism in isolation (p. 90).

Some Aboriginal adoptees, such as Ernie Crey have managed to overcome their experiences in foster care and in their adoptive families. As Crey (1997) reflected upon his experiences he stated, "despite my parental lapses, my children have all grown up to be independent, healthy beings" (p. 41). Nonetheless, his family continues to be marked by the effects of the Sixties Scoop. As Crey continued his reflections of how his siblings were affected by the residential school experience of their father and their adoption during the Sixties Scoop, he stated "Jane [one of Crey's sisters who was also adopted into a white family], gave birth to a son who was adopted by the same parents...Jane now spends most of her time on Vancouver's meanest streets, on a methadone-maintenance program but receiving no psychiatric care or counselling to help her cope with the immense losses in her life" (p. 43).

The residential school system and the Sixties Scoop gave birth to an internal conflict that continues to exist within many Aboriginals today. That is, the values Aboriginal children were forced to adopt were based in Christianity, individualism and paternalism; ideologies inherently different from the matriarchal, collective, and holistic perspective of Aboriginal cultures. The values Aboriginals experience in the dominant society are often in conflict with traditional teachings of their families, for in their experience it is the Christian ideology that gains the most value and respect. Consequently, as suggested by Fournier and Crey (1997), many Aboriginal peoples who experienced residential school and/or adoption into a white

family have difficulties fitting in dominant society as well as their Aboriginal community. As Joyce McBryde, an Aboriginal adoptee who eventually reconnected with her Aboriginal family, commented, in her adopted family “there was no one to talk to about feeling disconnected from my aboriginal identity” (Fournier & Crey, p. 97). She later discussed how she tried to fit in with her Aboriginal family: “I tried everything I could do to be the way I thought the rest of my family was. I became promiscuous, I drank too much and I got involved in an abusive relationship” (p. 98). Even today, she continues to experience an ongoing struggle to feel secure and happy with who she is. She revealed:

On a daily basis, I still have to work at liking myself. I have a right to go home to [to my adoptive family]...I have a right to know my birth mother. I didn't choose to be brought up in a white middle-class home. I have two mothers who love me and I love both of them. But for the past two to three years I've felt a real distance from both of them. I feel like I'm betraying one or the other if I spend time with either (p. 99).

The impact of residential schools and the Sixties Scoop on Aboriginal peoples is an important consideration in this study for two major reasons. Firstly, they have played a central role in influencing the lives of many Aboriginal peoples who have been in conflict with the law. According to CPVAW (1993), “many victims of abuse at the residential schools in turn become the abusers, inflicting on their own children what they had been forced to endure at the residential school” (p. 154). This vicious cycle also exists for Aboriginal peoples who were adopted and often abused in foster and/or adoptive families. In a study by Lawrence (2004), all of the adoptees or children of the adoptees indicated that they had problems with alcohol and drug abuse, depression, suicide, and uncontrollable rages. According to Fournier and Crey (1997), “In 1990, a survey of aboriginal prisoners in Prince Albert penitentiary found that over 95 per cent came from either a group home or foster

home” (p. 90). Violence and substance abuse became normalized for many Aboriginal peoples. As Sharon Blackeborough, a Sto:lo⁶ woman, explains “because I grew up with sexual abuse and neglect and the chaos of adult relationships around me, I thought it was okay to live like that” (Fournier & Crey, p. 126).

The connection between experiences of violence and involvement with substance abuse cannot be ignored. Ninety percent of Aboriginal FSW report extensive histories of physical and/or sexual abuse (TFFSW, 1990). Furthermore, in a comparison between the needs of Aboriginal and Caucasian woman offenders, 87% of Aboriginal women are reported to have needs related to substance abuse, compared to 37% of Caucasian women (Dell & Boe, 2000). This dependency on drugs and alcohol is argued to be caused in part by parents to cover the grief of losing their children, and the children who used alcohol to cover up the traumatic experiences (Founier & Crey; Faith, 2006).

Secondly, testimonies of incarcerated Aboriginal women indicate that prison is an extension of residential schools; an institution of control and an instrument of assimilation (Faith, Sugar & Fox, 1990). Prison is another colonizing form of confinement which has “taken people away from their families and locked them up in hostile institutions where everything is painful, sterile, frightening, lonely and alien” (Faith, p. 281).

An underlying assumption in this research is that the status of Canada’s Aboriginal peoples is rooted in the oppression and subjugation they experienced in their past. Policies such as the Sixties Scoop, and institutional structures such as residential schools, served to reproduce and reinforce the values of one culture, and in turn destroy that of another. The systemic disenfranchisement of Aboriginal peoples had a particularly devastating effect on the lives of Aboriginal women. The following section discusses how certain components of

⁶ As defined by Crey (1997, p. 21), the Sto:lo, which means people of the river, “are a large Coast Salish nation, now organized into twenty-five communities of 8,000 people, whose traditional territory extended from the ocean mouth of the Fraser River all along the valley to the Fraser Canyon [in British Columbia]”.

the Indian Act, particularly the residential schools and the loss of registered Indian status, robbed women of their place as a valued member of their family and their community.

Aboriginal Women

The establishment of the Indian Act had a particularly harsh impact on Aboriginal women. The Act is described as incredibly effective and efficient in the abolition of Aboriginal women's rights, status, and identity (CPVAW, 1993). Traditional Aboriginal societies were often matrilineal. That is, many Aboriginal cultures "existed within a complex system of relations of societies that were based on balance" (Anderson, 2000, p. 57). With the induction of the Indian Act, these matriarchal social systems of structure and order, such as the clan system of the Iroquois, were disrupted. As Lawrence (2004) explains,

Not only was the matrilineal basis of the [Iroquois] society threatened by legislation that forced Native women to become members of their husbands' communities, but the manner in which white women received the Indian status of their husbands resulted in the births of generations of clanless individuals within reserve communities, since clan inheritance passed through the mother (p. 51).

Aboriginal women used to hold positions of authority in their family and community. Prior to European contact, Aboriginal women were considered important decision-makers in their community (Lawrence; Monture-Angus, 1995). According to Lawrence, the control and oppression exerted upon older Aboriginal women was intentional, as they had the general authority in decision-making. Before European settlement, Aboriginal women were never considered inferior (Public Inquiry into the Administration of Justice and Aboriginal People, 1991).

As indicated by CPVAW (1993), "traditional [Aboriginal] societies universally recognized the power of women to bear life. It was believed that women shared the same

spirit as Mother Earth, the bearer of all life, and she was revered as such” (p. 122). Anderson (2000) also highlights how women in many Aboriginal nations had authority over the distribution of food in their communities, had political authority, and held a strong relationship to land and property as they were the ones responsible for lodging. While life for Aboriginal women in their communities was not always good, there was still a common sense of power among its members (Anderson). The imposition of European traditions on Aboriginals displaced their traditional belief systems and the role of women in Aboriginal society, thereby creating a source of division and disharmony within contemporary Aboriginal society. While financial losses have been substantial for Aboriginal women who have lost their legal status, the personal and cultural losses are most frequently discussed (Lawrence, 2004). Specifically, these women talk about how they have been rejected from their former communities and socially rejected from white society, unable to participate in the life of their family and access cultural programs for their children, and not being able to be buried with family on the reserve (Lawrence). During a research roundtable in Kamloops, BC, lost identity was recognized as one of the main reasons for the disproportionate number of Aboriginal women who are incarcerated (Faith, 2006).

Furthermore, the relationship between mother and child was drastically altered for generations to come. For instance, as CPVAW (1993) further explains, “the residential school system cut to the very soul of Aboriginal women by stealing their most valued and vital role of mother and grandmother” (p.124). The Aboriginal ideology of motherhood is based in the right and responsibility in making decisions on behalf of the children and community (Anderson, 2000). While some women in Aboriginal communities did not have biological children, they were mothers in a figurative sense as they taught, nurtured and healed all people (Anderson). In some sense, the residential school system destroyed the essence of Aboriginal communities by removing the children, the very core of Native society. As

Anderson explains, “Aboriginal children...represent the future...everyone in the community has a connection to the children, and everyone has an obligation to work for their well-being” (p. 159). When children were stolen from their families, mothers and grandmothers lost their ability to teach and pass on wisdom that had been given to them by their elders. This wisdom includes parenting skills and other cultural norms and values which help facilitate the prohibition of deviant behaviours (Public Inquiry into the Administration of Justice and Aboriginal People, 1991). In Aboriginal tradition, knowledge, values and skills are taught through stories and legends. These stories are passed orally from generation to generation, from elder to child. This process is not as simple as the telling of a story. Rather, the oral tradition is rooted in trust, which is nurtured over time (CPVAW). The displacement of Aboriginal children from their homes not only destroyed the family bonds and stripped Aboriginal women of one of their most important roles, but also severed a major artery for the maintenance and generation of a cultural identity and altered traditional Aboriginal society forever (CPVAW).

The residential school system also contributed to the manifestation of female sin and inferiority (Anderson, 2000). Anderson emphasizes that experiences of the residential school limited women’s spirituality to “the troublesome role of Eve or the impossible role of the Virgin Mary...[and] women became devalued spiritually and devalued by their male counterparts” (p. 77). Smith (2005) argues that the demonizing of Aboriginal women can be understood as a part of the oppressive system in which white men maintain control. The residential school system furthered a belief that Native women were evil (Anderson). Indeed, Smith contends that through experiences of sexual abuse in residential schools,

Indian people [would learn] the ideology that Native bodies are inherently violable...As a consequence of this...abuse of their bodies, Indian people learn to internalize self-hatred, because body image is integrally related to

self-esteem. When one's body is not respected, one begins to hate oneself (p. 12).

Another consequence of the Indian Act was the stipulation that Aboriginal women with registered Indian status would lose this status upon marriage to non-status men. As many have argued, the legislation was clearly discriminatory against Aboriginal women (Hedican, 1995; Native Women's Association of Canada, 2006). In 1985, under Bill C-31 amendments to the Indian Act were made, which, in the case of Aboriginal women who had married non-Status or non-Aboriginal men, restored status to these women and their children (but not their grandchildren). However, even with these amendments, the Indian Act continues to threaten the long-term survival of Aboriginals.

The effect of Bill C-31 increases the difficulty for status Indians to maintain their status. Under the amended Indian Act, no individual can gain status by marrying a registered Indian-status. Prior to 1985, a non-status woman who married a status man would gain status. Under the new Act, as Lawrence (2004) explains,

Bill C-31 not only continues but enlarges the "bleeding off" of individuals from legal recognition as Indians by extending new status restrictions to men as well: while nobody now loses status for marrying non-Native. All Native people now face certain restrictions on their ability to pass status on to their children (p. 64).

Bill C-31 also created a new division among Aboriginals peoples with respect to who was eligible to pass registered Indian-status on to their children (Lawrence). As indicated earlier, women reinstated their registered Indian-status under Bill C-31 were only able to pass on their status on to one generation, that being their children. Furthermore, the Native Women's Association of Canada (2006) describes the bill as a two-tiered system as a residual gender

discrimination against Aboriginal Women and their descendents. According to the Public Inquiry into the Administration of Justice and Aboriginal People (1991),

This [Bill C-31] is an extremely convoluted registration scheme in which the discrimination is not readily apparent on the surface...examples are necessary to make this more obvious. Joan and John, a brother and sister, were both registered Indians. Joan married a Metis man before 1985 so she lost her Indian status...under the former Act. John married a white woman before 1985 and she automatically becomes a Status Indian. Both John and Joan have had children over the years. Joan is now eligible regain her Status under...[Bill C-31], and her children will qualify... They are treated as having only one eligible parent, their mother, although both parents are Aboriginal. John's children gained Status at birth as both parents were Indians legally, even though only one was an Aboriginal person. Joan's children can pass on status to their offspring only if they also marry registered Indians. If they marry unregistered Aboriginal people or non-Aboriginal people, then no Status will pass to their grandchildren. All John's grandchildren will be Status Indians regardless of who his children marry (p. 204).

Thus, even with legal reinstatement of registered Indian status for Aboriginal women, many of these women continue to experience the discrimination and oppression that was instilled upon them by the Act over a century ago.

In addition to the governing body of the state, Aboriginal women are treated in the same regard by their own band council and chiefs, who are generally male and who have come to adopt the patriarchal philosophies of the European culture. In 1970, Yvonne Bedard, an Aboriginal woman from Six Nations, returned to her home bequest to her by her parents following separation from her non-status spouse. As legislated by the Indian Act, when

Bedard married her non-status husband, she lost her registered Indian-status. Bedard was ultimately evicted by the band council as she was not a registered band member any longer. As Monture-Angus (1995) concludes, “Many of the rules developed to protect Indians are now used by Indians against Indians, particularly against Indian women” (p. 135).

In significant ways, the amendments to the Indian Act in 1985 further exacerbated the oppression against Aboriginal women. Under Bill C-31, bands can determine their own membership, which thus separates registered Indian-status and band membership. According to CPVAW (1993), many chiefs and band councils continue to deny women their rights on the reserve. This may be due in part to the shortage of housing on the reserves (Faith, 2006). Nonetheless, Aboriginal women are forced to move into urban areas where they lack support and access to services that are only available on the reserve. Furthermore, much like the non-Aboriginal governments, Aboriginal governments do not give priority to women’s needs or perspectives and focus on issues related to power and control (CPVAW, 1995). Land claims and self-government take priority over health and social issues, such as the overwhelmingly high rates of prostitution and violence against their women. Notably, as Monture-Angus (1995) contends, while many band governments have followed the lead of non-Aboriginal governments and contributed to the oppression of Aboriginal women, “it must still be remembered that the author of the abuse was not Indian men but the federal government” (p. 146). Bill C-31 may have ended formal gender discrimination in the Indian Act, but it still maintains patriarchal divisions by not addressing past injustices.

Back to the Future

The emotional scars and turmoil from control and manipulation are painfully evident in the lives of Aboriginal peoples today. Aboriginal peoples of Canada are isolated, living in poverty and struggling for cultural identity and recognition. Arguably, the status of Aboriginal peoples is a direct consequence of the Indian Act and the limitations that continue

to be imposed upon them by this policy (Hedican, 1995). CPVAW argues that, “paternalistic laws and bureaucratic policies of the federal and provincial governments towards Aboriginal peoples have undermined traditional economies and have transformed self-sufficient Aboriginal nations into little more than ‘welfare states’” (p. 151).

While historical treatment of Aboriginal peoples has contributed to their severely disadvantaged economic status, simply increasing their income is not a viable answer. Over 55 years ago, an oilfield was discovered at Pigeon Lake. This lake was the traditional fishing ground for the four Cree bands (Samson, Ermineskin, Louis Bull and Montana) near the town of Hobbema, Alberta. By the peak of the oil boom in 1983, the four bands were receiving \$185 million in annual royalties from the oil companies (York, 1990). According to York, from 1985 to 1987 there was a violent death on the reserve every week and suicide rates continued to soar. This sudden wealth put more value on material possessions and reinforced the capitalist culture of the Europeans while the value of family and spirituality remained lost. His analysis suggests that the cause of the marginalized status of Aboriginal peoples in Canada resides within a complexity of issues embedded within centuries of control from a powerful outside force.

Control through the Indian Act destroyed Aboriginal cultures and ultimately, the soul of Aboriginal peoples. This loss of identity and culture is the outcome of destroying natural rhythms of survival based upon hunting and fishing, the disappearance of generations— the result of residential schools, and upheaval of cultural institutions such as Potlaches and Pow Wows, which served to maintain social order and preserve the unity and solidarity of Aboriginals. Change and the revitalization of this community depend on healing the wounds of the past and recreating an Aboriginal identity that is defined with pride. Healing, defined by Aboriginal peoples is a unified process of recovery encompassing the self, the family, the

community and the entire nation (CPVAW, 1993). The main objective is to begin the healing (CPVAW):

Reality can change when we know our responsibilities and our spiritual beliefs and when we respect life and each other. The sacred knowledge of our ancestors will guide us through these troubled times and will help us heal ourselves. By knowing who we are and by caring...we will eliminate all that is negative and again become healthy in mind, body and spirit (p.166).

This opportunity must be made available to all, including those who are incarcerated in Canada's prisons. According to Faith (2006), contact with Elders and experiencing traditional rituals and ceremonies can have a positive, healing effect. She further argues that "the Sisterhood can provide a community wherein healing of the body, mind, spirit and emotions can occur amidst the safety and trust of one's own cultural family" (p. 299). This study investigated how CSC's model of rehabilitation intersects with opportunities for healing and identity development in federal women's corrections.

Conflicting Ideologies: Canada's Justice System and Aboriginal Justice

There is a high level of incongruence between the Canada's justice system and Aboriginal justice. While CSC embarked upon changing its approach towards the treatment of female offenders, the criminal justice system in Canada continued to be predominantly based upon crime and punishment. Specifically, the focus was on the punishment of the offender who must pay his or her debt to society. However, the philosophy of Aboriginal justice puts emphasis on the atonement of the victim and the resolution and healing of all those involved, including the community (CPVAW, 1993). Justice as healing is a source for community healing because it emphasizes development, as opposed to deviance and criminality (Proulx, 2003). As indicated by the John Howard Society in their consultation with the Task Force (1990), Aboriginal justice is a restorative model of justice rather than a

retributive one. Emphasis is placed on mediation, reparation, reconciliation, and ultimately healing.

For many Aboriginal people, healing is the objective of justice (Proulx, 2003). Within this model of justice, problem-solving and dialogue are central with focus on the offenders within their culture and community. Victims also need their power restored and the offender needs to accept responsibility and accountability. According to Proulx (p. 49), healing is a “slow and steady process with tolerance for backsliding”. Indeed, Aboriginal justice encompasses a holistic approach by teaching and counselling the victim, as well as the offender and the community. Banishment from the community is perceived to be a last resort (Ross, 1999).

Similarly, Aboriginal holistic approaches to healing and reintegration are at odds with the cultures and philosophies of conventional prison environments (Arbour, 1996). Different conceptualizations of justice invariably affect the courses of action taken. Ross (1992), an assistant crown attorney for the District of Kenora, Ontario, who has worked extensively with the Cree and Ojibwa people to encourage change in the Canadian court system to make it more responsive to the needs of Aboriginal communities, observes:

We [the correctional system in Canada] repeatedly remind them [criminals] of the destructive results of their behaviour... We threaten offenders with heavier sentences if they repeat their offences. We tell them it will likely be hard to curb their bad habits, cure their addictions or control their violent impulses. Although we speak of rehabilitation we do so in a tone which suggests that we doubt they will make it. We... obviously rely heavily on punishment (p.168).

Recently, the Conservative government introduced Bill C-27, which requires offenders to prove why they should not be declared dangerous offenders (CBC News, 2006). Currently, the Crown must provide evidence to indicate why an individual should be declared a

dangerous offender. Other recent legislation includes doubling mandatory sentences from one to two years and restricting parole eligibility for certain firearm crimes (Department of Justice, 2005), and imposing mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes and curtailing the use of house arrest as an alternative to a prison sentence (Quinlan, 2006). As evidenced in these latest crime bills, the government assumes the highest level of risk of the offender. In contrast, Ross' observations of Aboriginal approaches to crime drastically differ from the approach of Canada's justice system:

At every step they [Elders] tell each offender they meet not how hard [he or she] will have to work to control his [or her] base self but instead how they are there to help him [or her] realize the goodness that is within...Elders seem to do their best to convince people that they are one step away from heaven instead of one step away from hell...[In Canada's current justice system] the use of coercion, threats or punishment by those who would serve as guides to goodness would seem a denial of the very vision that inspires them (p. 169).

Aboriginal philosophy of justice involves a process which begins with encouragement and faith and includes concern for the offender, the victim and the community.

While it is important to understand the tensions that exist between Aboriginal conceptualizations of justice and Canada's current justice system, understanding Aboriginal restorative justice by simply contrasting the process with retributive justice is insufficient. Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie (2005) argue that the tendency of this polarization is counter-productive as it distracts from moving towards a more balanced understanding of justice. These authors also contend that emphasizing the dichotomy reinforces retributive justice as the dominant system as it becomes the definite form of justice against which others are measured. Rather, Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie encourage conceptualizing Aboriginal justice from the perspective of the community. They suggest that instances of Aboriginal

justice ought to be measured by “the degree to which they are truly grounded in the community, ‘fit’ with the culture of the community, and are effective at resolving conflict and encouraging greater peace and health in communities” (p. 88). Relationships are central to Aboriginal law. Monture-Angus (2000) asserts that “people (or any ‘thing’ with spirit) were not intended to be managed but rather respected” (p. 56). In this regard, Aboriginal restorative justice must be initiated from the community. However, the emphasis of community in Aboriginal conceptualizations of justice is problematic as many contemporary Aboriginal communities are impoverished, fractionalized, and continue to struggle with persistent structures of oppression and control (Dickson-Gilmore & La Prairie).

Aboriginal researchers such as Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie (2005) and Proulx (2003), argue that Aboriginal community is difficult to define. According to Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie,

The definitive ‘Indian community’ as a rural, reserve-based one is increasingly undermined by the reality that nearly three-quarters of Aboriginal people, especially Indian and Métis people, reside off-reserve, many in urban centres. It is also apparent that Aboriginal people occupy a range of positions in the socio-economic landscape...the majority [are], namely, the life of the ‘working poor’ or unemployed, living near or below the poverty line, with limited opportunities through which to escape that reality (p. 27).

Furthermore, a study by Proulx found that many Aboriginal people living in Toronto were unaware of the services, organizations, and events that were a part of Toronto’s Aboriginal community. He also contends that oppressive structures have denied Aboriginal people to define their identity and community. Essentially, the capacity of Aboriginal communities has been impaired by a legacy of colonial structures to realize restorative justice truly and effectively.

Evidenced through this chapter is a history wrought with the destruction of Aboriginal cultures. This process was ingrained within a universal system of control maintained through the use of discriminatory and coercive practices and is continued through legislation and social institutions such as Canada's justice system. While changes occurred in Canada's correctional system for women, incarceration is inherently grounded within a system of disempowerment and control (Foucault, 1995). The following chapter continues to explore the oppressive experience of incarceration, the complexity of issues affecting female offenders and the potential impact of leisure as a source of control and resistance, as well as a vehicle for assimilation and expression.

Chapter 3 – Other Relevant Literature

Incarceration: A System of Power and Control

Power, according to Foucault (1995) cannot simply be possessed. Rather, it is exercised and can only exist and be employed in a social network (Foucault; Rouse, 1994). Foucault's analysis of prisons assumes that incarceration is part of a mechanism of power that produces delinquents and distinguishes these delinquents from an elite group of people who use incarceration as a form of justice to serve themselves. The penal system provides the social context for the exertion of power through discipline and punishment, which is created through the control of space and activity.

Control of Space

The control of space requires enclosure and entails various techniques such as observation and partitioning (Foucault, 1995). The correctional institution itself is a place of confinement for those who have been convicted of illegal activity; it is a place set apart from the rest of society, designed to ensure that discipline occurs in its most effective form. The design includes observation posts such as watchtowers, and more ubiquitous today, video cameras. Foucault suggests that disciplinary space avoids the formation of groups and collective dispositions by dividing itself into as many sections as there are bodies. For example, divisionary spaces at P4W could be found in the traditional cells, which served as confining living units for each woman. Presently, in the new facilities, there are individual houses where no other women except for the residents of that particular house are allowed. Foucault concludes that the aim of disciplinary spaces “was to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise conduct of each individual, to assess

it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits” (p. 143). In other words, the main premise behind the design of disciplinary spaces is for surveillance.

According to Foucault (1995), surveillance is the uninterrupted and calculated gaze, which enables disciplinary power to have a constant, yet indistinguishable presence since it is, in principle, everywhere and largely silent. As he states, prison consists of “an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power on them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them” (p. 172). Surveillance is one method that supports this system of organization, which is perhaps better described as a system of coercion. Surveillance enables disciplinary power to become integrated into a system that promotes efficiency (Foucault). This system seeks to promote productive functioning and thus focuses on immediate action as opposed to the outcome, which turns the individual into a subjugated body that produces meaningless actions. Such control of activity is discussed in the following sub-section.

Control of Activity

The control of activity contributes to the disciplinary environment. This control is achieved through the strict use of a time-table and collective, obligatory action. Foucault (1995) suggests that the use of a time-table under disciplinary measures is to ensure that the individual becomes “a body of exercise rather than of speculative physics; a body manipulated by authority, rather than imbued with animal spirits” (p. 155). This time-table helps to establish a controlled and regimented program based on a repetitive sequence of actions and enforces a collective coercion of bodies. For example, at GVI daily movement is allowed only between the hours of 7:45 and 22:00 (21:00 in the winter) and all FSW must be in their rooms for headcount at 5:50, 11:45, 16:20 and 22:15 (21:15 in the winter) (GVI, n.d.). This regulatory system imposes order that is easy to observe, manipulate and control because

it provides perpetual comparison of an individual in relation to other individuals or a certain itinerary.

The manipulation and control of activity is enforced through punishment. According to Foucault (1995), punishment affirms the dissymmetry of forces between the powerful and powerless and, more specifically, between the judges and the accused. He suggests that disciplinary punishment is explicitly laid down by a set of regularities defined by a select group of individuals, which ultimately obligates prisoners to behave a certain way. Offenders can be coerced into programs which satisfy the objectives of the authorities rather than their own. For instance, a woman could be paroled on her agreement to participate in a certain program (Hannah-Moffat, 2000). Within this system “the definition of behaviour and performance [is] on the basis of the two opposed values of good and evil....all behaviour falls in the field between good and bad marks” (Foucault, p. 180) and every behaviour that does not conform to the prescribed good is punishable. Disciplinary punishment is a system that differentiates between good and bad and maintains control by humiliating those who do not conform.

In short, Foucault’s (1995) conception of incarceration suggests that prisons function within a system of power and control. The control of space through surveillance and the control of activity through punishment are two means by which a disciplinary structure is supported and maintained. The outcome of this coercive system is the production of *docile bodies*. Foucault refers to the docile body as “something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed...gradually corrected...turning silently into the automation of habit” (p. 135). A docile body is the reduction of the individual into a mindless machine that can be conditioned to act in accordance with a prescribed and predictable behaviour.

Research on Incarcerated Women

Feminist criminologists such as Smart (1995) and Scraton (1990) argue that traditional criminological research is based in androcentric theories of crime and punishment and that women's accounts and experiences are largely ignored. According to Smart, "the lack of attention devoted to the question of crimes committed by women, their characteristics...and treatment has given rise to the present unsatisfactory understanding of female offenders and the offences they commit" (p. 17).

Early criminological research was less concerned with justice and more on locating causes of crime within the individual by focusing on the physiology or psychology of the offender (Jupp, 1989). Virtually no consideration was given to structural explanations and social contexts such race, gender and class. This focus on the individual is evident in Lombroso's work (1911), which concluded that criminals were simply born that way after he compared the skulls of criminal and non-criminal men and claimed that criminals shared certain physical features such as a receding forehead, large jaw, dark skin and curly hair.

In the 1970's, a new wave of criminological studies emerged which considered the influence of an individual's socio-economic status and the social construction of crime, particularly in working-class, blue-collar sub-cultures (Jupp, 1989; Scraton, 1990). However, even with these new theories of delinquency assumptions about gender remained (Scraton). These theories continued to perceive female offenders as victims of poor upbringing who lacked proper moral guidance and restraint and consequently needed greater protection (Boritch, 2001). Women who committed crimes needed to be rescued as well as reformed; saved as well as corrected (Rafter, 1990). During the 1980's, feminist theory and research began to "rewrite the criminological agenda to give greater emphasis to the reconceptualization of the nature of crime in terms of the structural position of women in society and also to the experiences of women as victims of crime" (Jupp, p. 3). Over the

years, research on women in prison has become more prominent as concerns about emotionality, context, the influence of dominant ideologies, and power relations have become embedded within this new era of criminological studies.

Researchers, such as Comack (1996) and Pollack (2003), have concentrated on the women's life experiences, as opposed to just their crime, in order to capture the realities of women who are now, or have been, incarcerated. In a study concerning the connections between women's law violations and their histories of abuse, Comack conducted semi-structured interviews with the women to capture their own voices in addition to the statistical data originally collected. Pollack also incorporated various methods to ensure that she gained an individual as well as cultural understanding of incarcerated Black women's experiences. Specifically, interviews were used to gain an understanding of the women's life-history, and focus groups were used to explore structural factors that lead to criminalization. As she suggests, combining two methodologies enables the researcher to develop an analysis of individual experiences and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions present in dominant ideologies that affect conceptions of incarcerated women.

This more holistic perspective removes the focus from the women's crime to a more well-rounded methodology, which involves understanding their history and the larger societal forces related to race, gender and class that may have influenced the current situations of incarcerated women. As Scraton (1990) suggests, "if the liberating potential of critical analysis is to be realized it needs to be understood in terms of...dominant structural relations and social arrangements" (p. 13-14). In turn, feminist research in criminological studies has given greater emphasis to the structural position of women in society and the experiences of women as victims of crime, and thus provided a more complete understanding to the lives of incarcerated women.

Feminist Reflections on Incarcerated Women

Feminists were the first to challenge the marginalization of women offenders (Gavigan, 1993). Feminist researchers such as Smart (1995) focus on the macro level of change as they advocate for the examination of assumptions lawmakers and the justice system make about women's place in society. Macro structures, such as White, male models of criminality which imposed dominant stereotypes associated with women's roles and emphasize power and control, have influenced the rehabilitation process of incarcerated women. Other feminists emphasize change at the micro level by fighting for equality for female offenders. This study offered a micro-analysis of the incarceration system as it focused on cultural events and experiences of women in prison.

Researchers such as Bloom (2003), Moffat (1991), and Nagel and Johnson (2004) argue for equality in terms of the quality of programs and level and care for women. Notably, these researchers are quick to stress that equality does not mean sameness. According to Nagel and Johnson, equality does not necessarily imply special treatment of women, because it reiterates the idea that women are weak and thus require special consideration. Nor does equality mean providing women the same services as men; as Moffat warns, doing so marginalizes women by providing them with a service they do not need. Rather, women have different needs and therefore require different methods of rehabilitation. Specifically, Bloom suggests that women's experiences of class, race, gender, abuse, trauma, addiction, must be considered to adequately facilitate their rehabilitation.

Women's Conceptualizations of Self

Overall, *Creating Choices* supported women's reconceptualization of self by recommending that new programming initiatives in the correctional system for FSW are woman-centred. However, the incarceration system continued to be based on training individuals to behave appropriately and "normally," which was generally in accordance with

the perspective of White males. Foucault's analysis of the incarceration system suggests that it is effectively corrective. As he states, "the power of normalizing imposes homogeneity" (p. 179). This system of discipline induces a constant pressure to conform to a specific behaviour by subjecting the women to behave according to a certain ideal. In an analysis of woman-centred corrections as exemplified in *Creating Choices*, Hannah-Moffat (2004) argues that:

Reformers and feminists have tended to emphasize the commonalities shared by women as a disempowered and marginalized group. Although this assumption of common disempowerment illustrates some of the undeniable experiential and demographic similarities between women prisoner and "free" women, it fails to articulate the heterogeneity that exists among women. The experiences of women in prison are much more than a microcosm of the experience of all women (p. 298).

In other words, she contends that associating female prisoners as having more in common with other women than male prisoners, or perceiving them as no different from other women in the general population, denies the involuntary and unique aspects of their experience of incarceration. Much of the discourse on female offenders centres around very specific social labels such as the unfit mother, the fallen woman and more recently with *Creating Choices*, the helpless victim with low self-esteem (Shaw, 1995). Sommers (1995) encourages the penal system to consider the *individual* experience of the woman in order to properly prepare for rehabilitation. This consideration should include the unique experiences and needs of Aboriginal FSW.

Development of Meaningful Relationships

In accordance with Foucault's (1995) analysis of the prisoner as a docile body, Stoller (2002) states that those who are incarcerated become "more of an object to manipulate and less of a person in relationship" (p. 2274). This disregard for relationships is particularly detrimental to the well-being of incarcerated women as their sense of self is typically defined in the context of relationships and judged by a standard of responsibility and caring for others (Gilligan, 1982). The literature suggests that the development of community for FSW is an important aspect to their rehabilitation process (Bloom & Covington, 1998; Savage & Kanazawa, 2002; Sommers, 1995; Steffenmeier & Allan, 2004). Social bonds may influence the behaviour of women more than that of men because females weigh the potential loss of relationships more heavily than males (Savage & Kanazawa). Admittedly, while women's desire to maintain their connections may have contributed to their pathways to crime, these bonds may also be used as a deterrent for female crime. In the same regard, Steffenmeier and Allan state, "women's risk taking is less violative of the law and more protective of relationships and emotional commitments" (p. 103). As suggested by Bloom and Covington, the primary motivation for women through life is not separation, but establishing a strong sense of connection with others. Mutually empathic relationships can lead to empowerment as women are able to both give and receive empathy. Thus, as Sommers indicates, opportunity for the development and maintenance of relationships is an important vehicle in the empowerment of women and ultimately their success of reintegration back into society.

Studies by Morgan (1997) and Sommers (1995) emphasize the centrality of relationships in women's lives. Sommers' study highlighted the struggle of female offenders to retain existing relationships and to connect with important others. As she states, "relationships organized around a core of mutual empathy were missing from the lives of the women, making them vulnerable to the demands of anyone who held the promise, however

illusory, of a mutually empathic relationship” (p.115). Morgan’s study reflects Sommers’ observation as she discusses how women often turn to each other in prison for companionship and support in the form of lesbianism, though oftentimes these relationships continue to perpetuate the abuse and exploitation the women experienced prior to their incarceration. Unfortunately, contrary to women’s need for connection with others, disciplinary institutions require the breakdown of the collectives. Accordingly, Bloom and Covington (1998) contend that, “the criminal justice system is designed to discourage women from coming together, trusting, speaking about personal issues or forming bonds of relationship” (p.12).

The new model of management acknowledges that most women prefer support and proposes that the focus be on support rather than security. Under the new system of management, *Creating Choices* suggests “every effort should be made to avoid creating a barrier through static security measures to human support systems” (TTFSW, 1990, p. 91). In particular, CSC has recognized the importance of family support. As Dodge and Progebrin (2001) indicate, “close ties to families during incarceration are crucial in maintaining connection with the community...and enhanc[ing] emotional survival” (p. 50-51). Furthermore, a study by Richie (2001) suggests that even having a non-custodial relationship with one’s children can be a stabilizing force in an incarcerated woman’s life.

By offering services such as the Private Family Visits program (CSC, 1994), CSC encouraged the development and maintenance of familial relationships. This program offers fully furnished family visiting units within the institution for women to meet with family members and other persons with whom the woman has a close familial bond. These visits are normally allowed once every two months for approximately 72 hours. As noted in Chapter 2, other changes to federal women’s corrections included the development of the six regional federal prisons (located in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia, and the Aboriginal Healing Lodge in Saskatchewan), which also better supported some FSW in

their efforts to remain closer to their families and communities (TFFSW, 1990). However, CSC still ultimately decides whether a woman is eligible for the program and which family members or significant persons can take part in the visit. The opportunity for family support exists, but its participants continued to be controlled by CSC. If an Aboriginal woman from outside Saskatchewan wants to serve her sentence at the Aboriginal Healing Lodge, then she still has to choose between services and isolation from her family (Moffat, 1991). As

Hannah-Moffat (2004) states:

When evaluating the choices made by prisoners in the new prison, a pressing question comes to mind about the determination of what Corrections Canada calls ‘responsible and meaningful choices’: For whom are these choices meaningful and responsible— the prisoner, the social worker, or the parole board? (p. 311).

In short, these changes, however positive, continued to exhibit elements of control and domination over FSW and limit the maintenance of their supportive relationships outside the prison.

Creating Choices also seeks greater community support as it encourages shared responsibility for the interdependence and self-reliance of FSW. For example, the Task Force (1990) suggests a team approach for the case management of the women. Specifically, they suggest that facility staff and community groups are jointly responsible for assisting FSW in developing a personal plan. The report repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the women creating community connections, stating that “women do not have adequate information” and that “women also had difficulty learning what services are available in various communities” (TFFSW, p. 96). Community connections may serve to break down barriers in the community, such as social stigmas and stereotypes, which may prevent the development of supportive relationships. While the recommendations concentrate on enabling the women to

have greater responsibility in their reintegration process, they fail to consider how community groups and agencies can be educated about the needs and risks for women returning to the community.

Moreover, it is difficult to understand how opportunities for the supportive relationships recommended in *Created Choices* could exist within the prison when the development of such relationships continue to be overshadowed by the traditional male-oriented classification based on security-risk. Foucault (1995) describes this system as art of rank where individuals are treated as bodies to be distributed into specific categories. Depending on the nature of their crime, FSW are placed under maximum, medium or minimum security. During the prison term, this position remains fluid as the women are moved back and forth between levels of security according to their behaviour. These levels of classification offer a system of reward and punishment. This system makes possible disciplinary penalty by providing a field of comparison between a hierarchy of abnormal and normal behaviour and provides a coercive structure that forces the individual towards “normality” (Foucault). Furthermore, Comack (1996) asserts that the current classification system into what she calls *crime categories* are legal constructions and limit the understanding of women’s legal violations as an outgrowth of problems, conflict and dilemmas. Programs based on the women’s crime and security-needs, such as drug groups and domestic violence groups, deny the realities of female offenders and their complex histories of oppression, trauma and dependency on drugs and alcohol (Bill, 1998). As a result women’s experiences of oppression and abuse and their need for support are obscured.

The Task Force (1990) recognizes that an incarceration system based on security is detrimental to the rehabilitation of women because it overshadows their need for support. However, no clear recommendations are made as to how the penal system can be organized. During the study, women continued to be classified under levels of minimum, medium, and

maximum security. The majority of federal women's prisons⁷ house women with all three levels of classification in the same facility. According to Moffat (1991), *Creating Choices* assumes that each facility will adapt to different levels of security needs. However, as she claims, there are bound to be some complications with this approach, especially when 'high need' or 'high risk' offenders are in the same institution with those who are classified under minimum and medium security. Most women in Federal Corrections are classified under minimum and medium security. In 2002, 95.8% of FSW were classified under minimum and medium levels of security, while only 4.2% were given the maximum level (Blanchette, Verbrugge, & Wichmann, 2002). Given that the protection of society is a paramount concern, in circumstances where women classified under all levels of security are housed in the same institution, high levels of control are often unnecessarily placed upon the majority of the women who do not require it. In such situations, these excessive levels of control can do more harm than good. Covington and Bloom (2003) assert that a controlled environment by its nature fosters dependence and powerlessness, which are two of the factors that lead women into the criminal justice system in the first place. Clearly, as supported by Moffat (1991), classification and security concerns were not adequately dealt with in *Creating Choices*, and FSW continued to receive more control than support.

In sum, for many women, a primary motivation in life is to establish a sense of connection with others. Thus, development of meaningful relationships within and outside the prison is crucial to the rehabilitative process of FSW. In response to the Task Force's (1990) recommendations, CSC placed particular emphasis on supporting and maintaining connections between women and their families. Opportunities for these services, however, continued to be limited and controlled by CSC. *Creating Choices* has also recommended a joint partnership between community groups and CSC to take part in supporting a woman's

⁷ The Okimaw Ohci Aboriginal Healing Lodge in Maple Creek, Saskatchewan is a medium and minimum

rehabilitation and reintegration. However, its recommendations systematically place responsibility on the women to inform themselves of the supports available while minimizing efforts for community education and advocacy. Furthermore, while the Task Force explicitly suggested that CSC move from a focus on security to a focus on support, traditional classification levels of security remain. Consequently, opportunities for relationship development both inside and outside the prison remain constrained by a system of control that minimize the importance of support.

Embracing Emotionality

In addition to focusing on the life experiences of incarcerated women, a number of feminist criminologists also emphasized the importance of recognizing the emotional aspect involved in doing prison research (Bosworth, 2001; Bosworth, Campbell, Demby, Seth, & Santos, 2005; Hill, 2004; Liebling, 1999). Bosworth reflects on how crime and punishment was studied in the past, insisting that we “do away with old fashioned ideas of ‘science’ in favour of emotions and ideology” (p. 439). She further argues that “studying crime or punishment is emotionally draining since they both cause human suffering” (p. 437). Similarly, Liebling (1999) concludes that research in any human environment without subjective feeling, particularly in a prison, is almost impossible. However, in her recount of her and her co-researchers’ experience doing research with maximum security prisoners she even questioned whether or not they should continue with their research when they found themselves empathizing and becoming emotionally involved with their research participants. As she states, “We were in danger of ‘going-native’ by this stage, identifying so powerfully with the feelings of prisoners...that we were becoming less able to bear the interviews. It was time to leave the field. The task was now to reconcile our powerful emotions with our ‘data’.

security institution, and the Isabel McNeil House in Kingston, Ontario, which is scheduled for closure (CBC News, 2007), is a minimum security institution.

Or was it?” (p.162). Positivist roots of criminology continue to influence researchers as they question the role of emotionality and ultimately the essence of humanity. Indeed, Arditti (2002) states, the “researcher’s experience is not bias, but is meaningful and will inform the scholarship...honoring the subjective allows for the inclusion of emotions in the research process— not just of the participants, but of the researcher” (p. 5).

Leisure Research

For the most part, North America’s understanding of leisure has stemmed from a Western conceptualization. That is, researchers often examine individualized experiences, such as individual leisure outcomes, rather than explore common experiences and the potential effects leisure may have on a community and overall social well-being. In other words, leisure research in North America has predominantly focused on psychological factors related to individual participation (Jackson & Scott, 1999; Mannell & Reid, 1999) and has segmented leisure. The focus on leisure as an individualized experience may be partly due to the pervasiveness of individualism in North American society (Arai & Pedlar, 2003).

According to Fox (2000):

The definitions, parameters, and actions related to leisure are constructed and molded by invisible forces related to cultural dynamics, power relations...and societal frameworks... So, leisure is surrounded by ‘invisible forces’ related to ontological and epistemological beliefs, commitments to specific leisure delivery systems, societal norms, and contextual forces among others (p. 32-33).

Although it may be unintentional, the way in which leisure experiences are provided and studied is part of a system that serves to reinforce and reproduce dominant values and understandings. As Fox further contends, “it is no accident, therefore, that freedom and individual perspectives and behaviour are essential features of leisure praxis (using a

standard, dominant, and historically, traditional definition of leisure)” (p. 33). North America’s focus on leisure as an individual activity separate from other aspects of life has led to a limited understanding of leisure experiences. Indeed, as Shaw (2001) indicates, “traditional definitions of leisure as a place of freedom, autonomy, individual choice, self expression and satisfaction, are inadequate” (p. 33).

Leisure is “one area of social life, among others, in which individual or group power is not only acquired, maintained and reinforced, but also potentially reduced or lost” (Shaw, 2001, p. 186). The majority of past leisure practice and research has not adequately considered its role in reinforcing and/or resisting dominant racial structures of power and control. Of the research that considers race in leisure studies, the majority examines differences in leisure participation, behaviours, and practices of diverse populations (i.e., Philipp, 1995; Outley & Floyd, 2002; Walker, Deng & Dieser, 2001; Washburne, 1978;), rather than considering the effects of these experiences in terms of oppression and/or resistance. Research on justice-related issues in race-based leisure research as institutional bias and program/agency non-responsiveness has yet to be explored (Allison, 2000).

More recently, there has been encouragement from scholars for leisure research to question invisible assumptions that have shaped our current understanding and facilitation of leisure. Researchers themselves have limited understandings of leisure and perhaps it is time to allow others to define leisure within the context of their experiences (Allison, Schneider & Valentine, 2000). According to Henderson (1998), “if we want to understand the meanings of leisure in society, then we must do our best to acknowledge that social, cultural, and historical differences do exist among people whom we research” (p. 160).

Critical Reflections on Leisure

Leisure as Social Control

Foucault's discussion of manipulation and control may also be applied to an analysis of leisure. Similar to Foucault's conceptualization of prisons, leisure can also be considered as a context for discipline and regulation. Social control refers to processes that reduce and prevent deviance (Cohen, 1966). In the same regard, leisure can play a role in reproducing dominant social ideologies, thereby contributing to the systematic production of socially acceptable individuals. Clarke and Critcher (1985) argue that the identification of choice with leisure is misleading. Specifically, they contend that leisure choices are limited to a certain range of options and that is decided upon by government and corporations, particularly in a capitalist society. Choice, in this context, is merely the ideological validation of a social system which denies people the power to exercise control. Furthermore, social divisions constrain the opportunity for leisure choice both materially and culturally.

Materially leisure resources are unequally distributed. Choice is restricted to how we dispose of our *personal* resources. But we exercise little control over the social allocation of those resources. Cultural constraint finds its most powerful expression through legal prohibition, but equally important of the day-to-day, routinised, expectations we hold of each others leisure conduct (Clarke & Critcher, p. 203, original emphasis).

Given the constraining environment of a prison and obvious limitations of choice, self-determination rather than choice may be more appropriate in terms of considering the leisure experience of FSW. Self-determination is synonymous with agency (Freysinger, 1999). Individual agency involves the use of an individual's abilities and capacities to make decisions, act as agents of change for themselves or the community, mobilize others and or catalyze action (Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal, 2001). In short, while the presence of

hierarchical systems of power and oppression constrain opportunities for choice, a leisure experience is still assumed to be the outcome of a self-determined decision to participate.

Clark and Critcher's discussion of the material and cultural constraints gives rise to considerations for gender, race and class and the effects of leisure on the social structures of society. One of the major criticisms of leisure research is that it has been primarily examined as an entity of its own. That is, the starting point for research in leisure has been the leisure experience itself (Floyd, 1998; Shaw, 2000). Researchers such as Fox (2000), Floyd and Shaw, have argued that leisure be examined as an influential factor in larger societal structures based upon the power inherent in divisions of class, gender and race. Shaw recommends that leisure be conceptualized as a life component that might affect, alleviate or exacerbate social problems such as racism and misogyny. Indeed, as Fox states, "no practice, including leisure, is free of power and its effects" (p.33). In short, leisure influences and is influenced by the racial, gender and class-based social systems.

Leisure, as described above, can be understood as a form of social control, whereby certain ideologies are imposed upon a group of people. The treatment of Aboriginals is an example of how limited understandings of diverse cultures and narrow conceptualizations of leisure in the profession have led to the demise of certain traditional Aboriginal practices. The unquestioning assumption that freedom and the individual experience are essential features of leisure affects more than just Aboriginal practices, it also contributes to the oppression and subordination of Aboriginals and the disintegration of their social structure.

Leisure for Aboriginals may be considered more than a participatory activity for enjoyment, relaxation, and relief from boredom. As suggested by Malloy, Nilson and Yoshioka (1993), recreation as a separate activity has little meaning for those whose experiences are rooted in Aboriginal cultures. Rather, they argue that recreation and leisure are intertwined in their lifestyle. In the same regard, Aboriginals view many forms of work as

a continuation of leisure (Cole, 1993). Pow Wows, which encompass song and dance also acts as a political forum where social order is maintained. Aboriginals have used competition in sports as an alternative to tribal conflict (Henhawk, 1993). Thus, leisure for Aboriginals may be perceived more as a context for community expression and well-being, as opposed to a separate free-time activity for individual development.

Unfortunately, as Cole (1993) states:

Traditional Aboriginal concepts of leisure/recreation have been replaced by more contemporary ideas which leave traditional ideologies to be viewed as secondary in importance or ignored altogether. Disregard for traditional activities contributes to further deterioration of culturally supportive activities which have historically welded First Nation communities together (p. 103-104).

In 1884, when the Native ceremonies such as the Pow Wow were banned, the government prohibited the cultural expression of Aboriginals and crushed their mechanism of social order. More than a century later, leisure professionals appear to be doing the same. As Cole further contends, the suppression of any social structure, even leisure, is followed by the slow degradation of culture.

A study by Henhawk (1993), which examined the development of recreation services in Ontario First Nations communities, reported that Native Chiefs were supportive of sport and recreation development in their communities as they perceived sport and recreation as prime motivators for overcoming social problems. Over the years the Ontario Indian Sports Council received funding from the Canadian federal government for activities such as leadership workshops, hockey, fast-pitch softball, golf, bowling, and track and field tournaments. However, by the 1990's, due to lack of funding and participation, and poor organization, many of these activities were discontinued. Notably, most of the activities that

were funded were representative of the dominant White culture rather than the traditional sports and recreational activities of Aboriginals, such as leg wrestling and lacrosse. In the attempt to help First Nation communities develop recreation programming and structures, some leisure professionals may have inadvertently contributed to the oppression of their culture by imposing a certain administrative style and promoting certain activities over others.

This discussion of leisure was primarily examined from a Foucault-based perspective, suggesting that leisure can be used as an apparatus that produces a socially disciplined subject ready to participate in the dominant White culture of North American society. On the other hand, leisure has also been documented as a beneficial form of human development, particularly in the form of resistance.

Leisure as Resistance

Human agency can be defined as operating generatively and proactively on social systems, not just reactively (Bandura, 1999). In other words, individuals have the ability to accept, reject or alter dominant values and social structures. Even if the choices for leisure are limited, individuals ultimately choose whether or not they wish to participate. Following a leisure experience, participants have the capacity to reflect upon their experience and judge whether or not they wish to adopt as their own all, some, or none of the courses of action and ideologies demonstrated in that experience. Should they accept these ideologies, new behaviours and attitudes have the potential to arise. Bandura describes this process as *abstract modelling*:

In abstract modelling, observers extract the rules governing specific judgements or actions different in content but embodying the same underlying rule. Once people extract the rules, they can use them to judge things and

generate new courses of behaviour that fit the prototype but go beyond what they have seen or heard (p. 25).

Embedded within the concept of abstract modelling is the assumption that individuals are capable of an active thought process; they need not necessarily be reduced to the docile bodies manipulated by the threat of surveillance and punishment.

Unlike the confining and coercive environment of prison, leisure can embody elements of freedom and self-determination (Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Shaw 1994). It is this sense of relative freedom and choice which provides the setting for resistance activities through the exercise of personal power (Shaw, 2001). Resistance can be understood as a personal or collective struggle against institutionalized power (Shaw, 1994). Shaw (2001) contends that “leisure as resistance implies that leisure behaviours, settings and interactions can challenge the way in which power is exercised, thus making leisure a form of political practice” (p. 187).

Indeed, leisure has been explored by several researchers as a forum for resistance and collective action. In a study by Glover and Bates (2006), African Americans fostered a sense of racial identity through the development of a community baseball league. The *First String* baseball league provided exposure to African American heritage and contributed to a sense of racial identity in the Black community. Teams were named after the old Negro League Clubs and the children in the league had access to role models from the same cultural background. Leisure can thus act as a site for the expression of one’s racial identity through the celebration of racial/ethnic heritage and through the collective development and maintenance of a common culture.

Leisure has also been examined as a site for resistance against dominant gendered ideologies for women (Freysinger & Flannery, 1992; Green, 1998; Wearing, 1990). As suggested in Green’s study, such leisure experiences for women can be a source of

empowerment and resistance to traditional stereotypes, ultimately contributing to the (re)construction of identity. According to Henderson (1996), over the past decade there has been increasing recognition for the numerous meanings of leisure for women, as opposed to the universal women's leisure experience. These meanings are based upon the life situations of women, their personal history and experiences as well as the social structure of the environment in which they live. Women's experiences of leisure can be defined as empowering and victimizing, it can also be considered a context of conformity and resistance to social roles and dominant ideologies (Henderson). Indeed, leisure is dynamic, "both continuity and change are evident in its forms, meaning and the social context in which it is pursued" (Clarke & Critcher, 1985, p. 205).

Guided by and understanding that experiences of leisure can be both empowering and constraining, this particular study examined experiences of Aboriginal women in a federal penitentiary, their involvement in cultural activities and the meaning these experiences had on their rehabilitation, healing and identity development.

Leisure and Quality of Life

Leisure as a context for resistance or social control does not negate the opportunity for participants to experience feelings of empowerment, belonging, identity development and self-affirmation (Haggard & Williams, 1999), spiritual well-being, flow, self actualization (Czikszenmihalyi & Kleiber, 1991), and other benefits associated with leisure. Indeed, as Kelly (1999) states, "the dialectic between expression and oppression that characterizes the rest of life in society is the reality of leisure as well...The multiples meanings of leisure include separation as well as community, determination as well as creation, and routine as well as expression" (p. 65). Thus, leisure has the potential to be considered as a context for the development of a variety of dimensions in life, from spiritual to physiological, from

individuals to community and essentially the overall quality of one's life. Quality of life encompasses a holistic perspective, which includes the spiritual, psychological, physical, and social aspects of an individual (Raeburn & Rootman, 1996). It also affords the ability to realize one's goals and aspirations and involves a sense of social connectedness and belonging in one's community (Renwick & Brown, 1996).

Social support and experiences of social connectedness may be of particular importance for Aboriginal FSW because of their history of exclusion and oppression and the ramifications of cultural disenfranchisement and shame. Indeed, the CPVAW (1993) contend that most cases of abuse can be traced to the residential school, from where victims carried the abuse back into the homes and their communities, "raised in a cold, institutional atmosphere, Aboriginal children were deprived of parental contact, which left them with little knowledge of traditional child-rearing skills that has been passed from generation to generation" (p. 154). Furthermore, Monture-Angus (2000) contends that "Aboriginal people do not belong to communities that are functional and healthy" (p. 57). The relationships of most Aboriginal FSW are filled with experiences of trauma, abuse and violence. Such experiences have impacted the quality of life of FSW and have probably contributed in some form to their pathway to crime.

Of particular interest for this study was the influence of social networks and the impact on social integration and health. According to Labonte (1996), "people's experiences of health and well-being are less about their experiences of disease or disability and more about their experiences of capacity and connectives" (p. 5). Social integration involves subjective evaluations of a person's relationship to his/her society and community. Keyes and Waterman (1998) define social integration as "the extent to which people feel they have something in common with others...as well as the degree to which they [feel] that they belong to their communities and society" (p. 480). In this study, the concept of health

included the social, mental, emotional, physical and spiritual aspects of an individual.

Specifically, Labonte suggests health or well-being mean:

A degree of physical vitality *and* a certain connectedness to others to enjoy good social relationships; we need a degree of physical vitality *and* a sense of meaning and purpose to both know, and act upon, what we enjoy; and we need a sense of meaning and purpose *and* a certain connectedness to others to experience a sense of control over our lives and living conditions” (Labonte, p. 5-6, original emphasis).

In the same regard, Raeburn and Rootman (1996) argue that health is a resource for living.

Reflections

Leisure has the potential to be a part of a process of social control that does not necessarily depend upon a system of power and oppression. That is, leisure as an experience that is freely chosen and intrinsically motivated (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997), has the potential to allow for choice and the exertion of human agency. Control systems can be considered as a *regulator* or a *servo-mechanism* (Bowlby, 1982). The purpose of a regulatory system of control is used to ensure a specified level of consistency where all behaviour is compared against a set of expected behaviours (Bowlby). This regulatory system resembles Foucault’s (1995) analysis of prison, where individuals are manipulated through discipline and punishment to act according to a pre-determined set of behaviours. The oppressive system of control is further exemplified in the earlier model and knowledge of corrections for female offenders, when they were expected to emulate the stereotypical role of the moral, nurturing, caring woman through forced isolation and domination.

In contrast to the regulatory system of control, the servo-mechanism system of control does not ascribe to a standardized set of expectations. Rather, as Bowlby contends, the norm is repeatedly or even continuously changing and the task of the system is to ensure that

behaviours are in-line with the norm every time it changes. Thus, focal practices experienced through leisure may be understood as a system of control that is dynamic, where the standard is created and re-created by its members as opposed to a dominant and oppressive force. The servo-mechanism of control may be more representative of the process of social control that takes place in leisure, particularly in circumstances when they serve to encourage the development of meaningful relationship, empower its members, and foster shared meanings.

Chapter 4 - Methodology

Preface: The Evolutionary Process of Critical Theory Research

The epistemological perspective of this study was based in critical theory. According to Patton (2002) critical theorists not only seek understanding and knowledge, they also aim to critique and change society. In the same regard, Guba (1987) suggests “the task of [critical] inquiry is...to raise people (the oppressed) to a level of ‘true consciousness.’ Once they appreciate how oppressed they are, they can *transform* the world” (p. 24, original emphasis). Opportunities for dialogue are crucial to consciousness-raising (Freire, 2000a). Freire’s concept of *conscientização*, which consists of a deepening sense of critical awareness of the world, is generated through dialogue; a process that can turn meaninglessness into meaningful, oppression into freedom, and control and manipulation into joint responsibility and commitment to one another. Furthermore, he asserts that it is the oppressed who will liberate their oppressors.

Critical theorists acknowledge multiple forms of power exercised through forces of class, race, gender, and institutionalized systems of oppression and strive to change this reality through dialogue with those who are marginalized and oppressed. Two underlying realities consistent throughout this study were the marginalized status of Aboriginal women, which stems from a history of control and assimilation, and the oppressive structure of incarceration. This study explored with Aboriginal FSW how cultural experiences within the prison impacted their ability to heal from the wounds of their past. Possibilities for change existed at many levels— the individual level, participants and researcher alike, the local institutional/community level and at the policy level. Change occurred for many of the women as they felt a sense of pride for being Aboriginal for the first time. Change also occurred at an institutional level as an Aboriginal Liaison was hired, a teepee was erected, and maximum security-level women were allowed to attend the Sweat. Many changes also

occurred at the personal level through the research process. As portrayed earlier through my poem, *Kicking and Screaming*, change occurred at the course of this study with my transformation from a constructivist to a critical theorist. Other changes included a deeper understanding of the impact of CSC policy on Aboriginal women's experiences of healing, and a deeper understanding of how my personal emotions affected the research, in terms of informing and sometimes paralyzing the production of knowledge.

When I first started going to Stride Nights, I thought the change in women's federal corrections from punishment to rehabilitation was absolutely wonderful. However, about half a year later, as I noted in my journal, I began to question the extent of this change (February, 2, 2005):

I'm beginning to wonder if this rehabilitation model is enough. We are still trying to impose a "correct" behaviour on these women. This kind of "therapy" won't have any meaning for the women unless they are able to internalize it and understand it on their own terms. Where's the learning?

At the onset of my research, based on the recommendations of several feminist criminologist researchers (Arditti, 2002; Bosworth, 2001; Bosworth, et al., 2005; Hill, 2004; Liebling, 1999), I was dedicated to embracing emotionality and allowed myself to become emotionally involved with the women. Indeed, studying crime and punishment is inherently painful (Bosworth, 2001; Liebling, 1999). While I still believe this process was beneficial to the depth of research I was aspiring to achieve, I came to understand that at some point this emotionality becomes overwhelmingly disheartening and paralyzing (June 29, 2006):

This week was my week off from the Prison, [which was definitely needed because] I found myself over empathizing with the women. While understanding the women's situation and becoming emotionally involved with the women is important to the integrity of the research and provides context to

data collected, I found myself losing sight of the objective of the project as I got too emotionally involved in the lives of the women in GVI...and was feeling quite desperate.

As exemplified in these passages from my journal and in *Figure 1* below, this study was constantly changing and evolving. Over a year of involvement in the Sisterhood, discussions with its members, my advisor and colleagues, and reflections of these discussions inspired the idea of centring a focus group around the creation of a drum song. Grounded in the hermeneutic circle, where researchers seek the historical and social dynamics that shape the interpretation, critical theory involves a continuous back and forth studying parts in relation to the whole and the whole in relation to the parts, and this circle proceeds with no need for closure (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Furthermore, in accordance with Pedlar (1995), action research, one of the methodologies used in this study, “occurs in the form of a spiral— a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, then further planning, acting, observing, and reflecting” (p. 136).

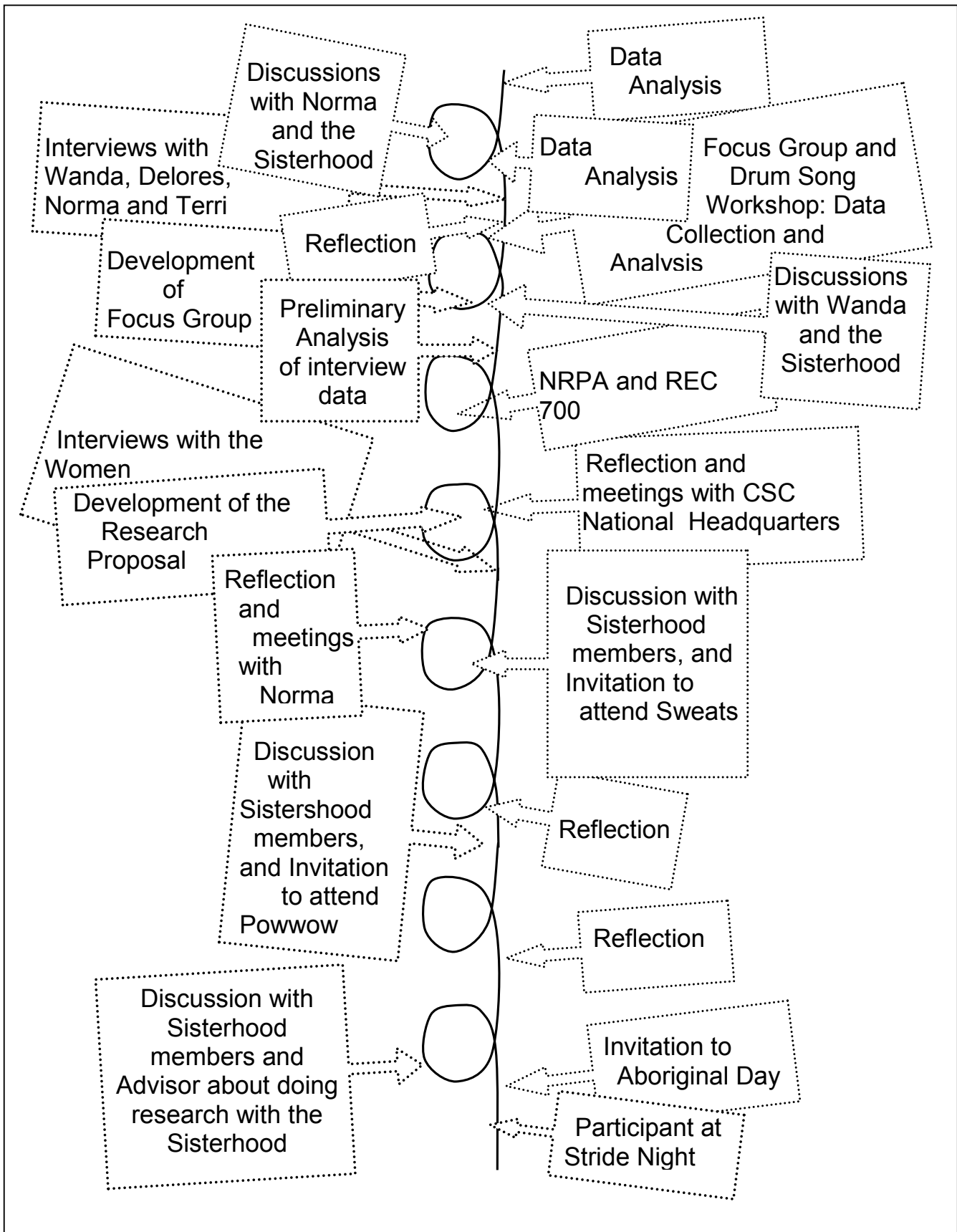


Figure 1. Research Process

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of major Aboriginal cultural events on the identity development, empowerment, healing and rehabilitation of FSW.

Specifically, there were three primary research questions:

1. Does participation in the Native Sisterhood and its activities affect a woman's rehabilitation and healing? If so, in what ways and how?
2. Does the Native Sisterhood contribute to a woman's self-identity and self-understanding? If so, in what ways and how?
3. Does the Native Sisterhood contribute to a woman's sense of belonging? If so, in what ways and how?

Critical Theory

According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2000), critical theory is primarily concerned with “power, justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system” (p. 281). These authors also contend that critical theory emerged from a concern that privileged groups reinforce the status quo to protect their advantages, and that rationalist scholars are so focused with issues of technique and procedure that the humanistic purpose of research is forgotten. In response, critical research attempts to expose the forces that have contributed to the marginalization and oppression of others, embraces collaborative research approaches, and embeds emotionality and the researcher and his/her values and beliefs into the research process. Freire's (2000a) discussion on the education system depicts how entire institutions can be organized to maintain power and oppression over others. In this study, forces of oppression include the penal system, historical and current policies such as the Indian Act and new legislation regarding crime and punishment.

Critical theory is ideologically orientated inquiry and places neo-Marxism, and Freirism under the realm of this paradigm (Guba, 1987). Marx based his analysis of society on the structure of capitalism, essentially suggesting that economic factors dictate all aspects of human existence (Garner, 2000). However, critical theory moves beyond this orthodox Marxist notion and argues that there are multiple forms of power which include class as well as other factors such as gender and race (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000).

Experiences of oppression for Aboriginal women are multi-faceted. As argued by Lawrence (2003):

Identities are embedded in systems of power based on race, class, and gender... For Native people, individual identity is always being negotiated *in relation to* collective identity, and *in the face of* an external, colonizing society” (original emphasis, p. 4).

The methodology of this study is embedded within *intersectionality theory*, which was developed by women of colour and ethnicity in response to their criticisms of the essentialist knowledge of women, which reduced “the articulation of oppression to what is seen as common among all women” (Brotman & Kraniou, 1999). This theory posits a matrix of identities based on race, ethnicity, class and gender (Mann & Huffman, 2005). Brotman and Kraniou argue that researchers cannot continue to separate and establish priorities in experiences of exclusion and oppression. Rather, intersectionality theory explores various forms of oppression, some of which may be more dominant than others, depending on the situation. Oppression can occur in multiple spaces simultaneously (Brotman & Kraniou). I would also add the experience of being researched as another space which has the potential to contribute to experiences of oppression through the affirmation of hierarchical structures of power and control. Thus, this study borrowed from four methodologies which stem from a critical theory perspective and help address the complexity of Aboriginal FSW experiences of

oppression and control, they are: action research, feminist inquiry, critical race theory and creative analytical practice.

Action Research

Action research problematizes the systematic relationship between power and the construction of knowledge (Maguire, 2001). This study recognizes that previous understandings of female offenders and management of corrections for women were based upon White, male perspectives and conceptualizations of crime and punishment. By adopting an action research methodology, the notion of change and the reconstruction of knowledge based on Aboriginal women's experiences come to the forefront of research. As discussed in *Creating Choices* (TFFSW, 1990), FSW are an invisible population. The participatory nature of action research for women in prison is described by Fine (2002) as a light in a tunnel of control and surveillance. Action research provides an opportunity for the presence of an absence and is intended to be emancipatory (Boog, 2003; Fine). In other words, action research begins with the acceptance of difference by acknowledging social inequities of power and the consequences of that relationship, and seeks to address this problem by providing a context for discourse between the powerful and the powerless, and by providing the opportunity for those who have been voiceless, for those who have been absent, to speak out and be heard. This is a continuous, iterative process that includes experiential learning and action (Boog).

Action research provides a starting point for change through *praxis*. Praxis occurs by entering into discussion with others and developing a critical awareness through dialogue. According to Freire (2006a), praxis enables individuals, and in this particular instance researcher and participants, to initiate change through collaborative meaningful reflection and action. In action research, the researcher and co-researchers are required to communicate the interpretations of the social situation that is being studied and reflect together upon its

problems and possible solutions (Boog, Keug & Tromp, 2003). Furthermore, action research is about emancipation, which thereby involves both the individual and the collective (Boog, 2003; Pedlar, 1995). Emancipation involves not only freeing oneself from domination, but also transforming society so that there may be a more equal distribution of power and control (Boog).

Dialogue with the women in this critical form occurred in both formal and informal settings. Interviews were conducted with 19 women who identified with Aboriginal cultures and were full or honorary members of the Sisterhood. These interviews are discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter. Informal occasions for critical dialogue between myself and the women occurred in instances such as before entering the Sweat Lodge as we sat around the fire while the Grandfathers (rocks) heat up, or during Stride Night. These discussions helped inform the development of this research.

Action research is also dependent on self-reflection (Pedlar, 1995). This critical evaluation of self can occur by adopting a reflexive approach to research and by using a reflexive journal. These concepts and how they were employed through the research are discussed under the section *feminist inquiry*.

One of the main tenets of action research is the full participation of the researched in all stages of the study (Pedlar, 1995). Aboriginal FSW were involved as much as possible, and as much as they wanted to be involved. Some of the women would listen to my reflections, but offered no advice or opinion when asked. During the analysis and write-up of the research one woman in particular, Joanne, was a guide and sounding-board. On my regular visits to the prison we often spent time together in a private setting where we would talk. I would tell her about my life, which always included the study, and she would tell me more personal stories of her life and hopes for the future. A similar process occurred for the development of my research questions and focus group with another woman, Shannon. As

Roberts and Dick (2003) suggest, engaging participants contributes to the development of data-driven or emergent research. They also suggest that participant involvement translates the theory developed from the research more easily into action.

Mutual learning relationships require those in positions of authority and privilege to be able and willing to accept the consequences of sharing power (Boog, et al, 2003). Transparency in terms of the research process, expectations and assumptions are crucial to the development of this relationship (Roberts & Dick, 2003). It has also been implied that researchers adopt a flexible approach. The transformative nature of action research also affects the methodological aspect of research. For example, the research process may become more elaborate overtime as the research evolves and as co-researchers are better equipped to understand the methodology (Roberts & Dick). The researcher's role may also change over time. At the beginning, the researcher may be more of a facilitator as she/he models the desired foundation for action research. However, over time this role could, and in fact should, lessen. In this particular study, the emphasis on my role as a researcher, as a volunteer, friend, observer, and participant fluctuated with the activity, event and situation. When preparing for the meeting with CSC officials for the request of a Native Liaison, the president and vice-president of the Sisterhood sought guidance and advice in terms of understanding and applying the Commissioner's Directive on Aboriginal Programming (reflexive journal, May 15, 2006). Another time during a Sisterhood meeting, the women asked me to do the opening prayer (reflexive journal, September 14, 2006). This task is generally reserved for the Native Elder or the Sisterhood president. Other times, I was a silent observer as members of the Sisterhood discussed various matters (reflexive journal, February 16, 2007), or perceived as a guest as the women would tell me to stand in the food line with all the other guests before the inmates at the Pow Wows and Aboriginal Day celebrations (reflexive journal, November 4, 2005).

Action research requires researchers to diverge from the traditional methods of scientific research. For example, the findings of traditional research are generally expected to be consistent with previously established knowledge (Roberts & Dick, 2003). However, in action research, deviation from the academic norm may require abandoning traditional forms of knowledge, such as what exists in the literature. According to Kirby and McKenna (1989), “research has often become a tool of domination which has helped perpetuate and maintain current power relations of inequality. Too often the experts who do research have been well trained in patterns of thinking which not only conflict with their understanding, but explain and justify a world many are actually interested in changing” (p. 17). Overall, action research requires the acceptance that there is no predictable outcome of the research (Roberts & Dick), and that power and knowledge can be (re)created through discourse (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001).

Feminist Inquiry

Discussions of critical theory have also often been associated with feminist inquiry (Guba, 1987; Patton, 2002). According to Olesen (2000) and Harding (2004), qualitative feminist research places women at the core and considers the diversity of their experiences and the institutions that frame these experiences. Specifically, feminist research questions the very production of knowledge by asking: “Whose knowledge? Where and how obtained and by whom, and for what purposes?” (Olesen, p. 217). Accordingly, feminist inquiry also considers the implications of the researcher’s personal characteristics in the research process and moves beyond the concerns of representation as it recognizes the relationship between knowledge and power. As Harding states, “knowledge and power are internally linked; they co-constitute and co-maintain each other” (p. 67).

In 1991, Harding observed that there were three different and partially conflicting approaches to feminist analysis. Feminist empiricism argues that the androcentric result of

research is a consequence of “bad science,” while postmodern feminists question whether feminist epistemology should continue the policing of conventional science. Feminist standpoint theorists believe that “the dominant conceptual schemes of the...social sciences fit the experience that Western men of the elite classes and races have of themselves and the world around them...by starting research from women’s lives, we can arrive at empirically and theoretically more adequate descriptions and explanations” (Harding, p. 48). Standpoint feminists do not invalidate past research; however, they argue that this research is only a partial understanding of the world and that a feminist perspective can provide another. Over the past decade, these three approaches multiplied and became much more complex. Essentially, feminist research has moved into the deconstruction of traditional understandings of gender and experience by considering other positions of marginalization and oppression such as race and class (Olesen, 2000).

This study adopts the perspective of standpoint feminism. Monture-Angus (1995) argues that “feminism as an ideology remains colonial” (p. 71). In response to such criticisms Harding (1991) proposes:

We should redirect our analysis of women’s situation and our agendas so that they are significantly closer to the more comprehensive ones advocated by women who suffer from more than what some women frequently see as simply “gender oppression” (p. 193).

Lawrence (2003) contends to simply regard identity for Aboriginal women as one of sexism ignores how “constant colonial incursions in Native spaces generate almost unimaginable levels of violence, which includes, but is not restricted to, sexist oppression” (p. 5). Thus, this study is based in an understanding that the lives of Aboriginal FSW’s intersect with multiple experiences of oppression related to gender, race, and class.

Principles of Feminist Inquiry

Edwards (1990) presents three principles of feminist inquiry, which have been incorporated into the methodological approach to this study. The first is to examine women's lives in their own terms. As Edwards argues, "women's round lives have been pushed into the square holes of male-defined theories, and where their experiences do not fit, those experiences have been invalidated, devalued, or presented as deviant" (p. 479). As discussed earlier, women have largely been absent in traditional criminological research, which was predominantly based upon male experiences and male conceptualizations of crime. The majority of the literature which is guiding the study, particularly concepts related to criminality, is based in feminist criminology and research. Analysis of the data will continue to place women's experiences at the forefront and pay special attention towards motherhood and re-establishing relationships with children, learning Aboriginal values and Aboriginal spiritual and cultural beliefs, and developing personal understanding and assuming responsibility for the valued role of Aboriginal women, the *Bearer of Life*.

Secondly, feminist research should be done *for* women and *with* women, as opposed to simply being done *on* women. This principle specifically raises the issue of the imbalance of power that exists in the relationship between the researcher and the researched. In order to counteract this oppressive relationship, Edwards places responsibility upon the researcher to maintain an honest relationship that enables women's voices and priorities to be heard, and for the researcher to ensure that research findings are accessible and relevant to the lives of these women. Through my involvement with Stride Night and the Sisterhood over the past three and a half years, I had the opportunity to develop a relationship with some of the women and engage in meaningful discussions which in turn contributed to my understanding of the women's experiences in the prison and the development of this research.

During the craft, Joanne [who's been incarcerated for 7 years] made several interesting comments about reintegration and the prison system. She said

something to the extent of how her friend Shelly, who was only incarcerated for 2 years, was having a tough time out in the community. Joanne went on to say that GVI works if you want to be here, but overall, it's not good system. I asked if she wanted it to go back to P4W, and she said no, but that prison shouldn't be like this either. Her perspective was that the new system still doesn't do anything meaningful for female offenders. She described her experience at GVI as mechanical as she just goes from program to program. I asked her about the Sisterhood, she replied that it wasn't the prison who started the group— the Aboriginal women had to fight for that. (reflexive journal, March 2, 2005)

The most difficult part in this process was feeling comfortable and sometimes having to push myself to venture out and ask questions that might lead into a contentious issue or the disclosure of a traumatic event (which, notably, seems to have made me more uncomfortable than such disclosure did to the woman). However, by adopting such an approach, researchers break the silence and provide the researched with the opportunity to use their voice and become co-constructors and agents of knowledge; eventually unmasking the hierarchical structures and absences that have been missing in the production of knowledge. Furthermore, as Bruns and Lesko (1990) suggest, making power dynamics visible is especially important for incarcerated women since it enables them to understand the connection between their experiences and hierarchical structures of power and privilege.

The third and final principle places the researcher in the process of knowledge production. A key component in feminist research is the impact of the inquirer's gender, race, class, assumptions and beliefs on the research. Intellectually, researchers are encouraged to explicitly state the procedures they used in carrying out their research and, more importantly,

explain the reasons why they were chosen. This final principle was actualized through the incorporation of a reflexive methodology.

Reflexivity

According to Dupuis (1999), reflexivity involves the conscious and deliberate inclusion of the self. She presents the implications of adopting a reflexive methodology in three areas. First, this reflective portrayal of self addresses how the researchers' personal experiences of the past and present shape the construction of knowledge. Second, reflexivity embraces the affective role as it encourages the consideration of how emotions influence the research and how it can inform researchers about the knowledge that is being constructed. Third, reflexive research recognizes the collaboration between researchers and participants in the co-creation of knowledge, thereby facilitating a relationship between researchers and participants that goes beyond the distant rapport traditionally prescribed in ethnographic research. Thus, reflexivity ultimately enables researchers to formally consider how personal characteristics affect the findings and interpretations of their research.

As noted earlier, a reflexive approach to this study was aided by the use of a reflexive journal, which helped inform the production of knowledge and was applied to demonstrate the dynamic and evolving nature of this research. The creation of the poem, *Kicking and Screaming*, also helped me continue the reflexive process by exploring some of the tensions I experienced throughout the research process.

Recording my reflections contributed to the discovery of how my personal characteristics and experiences influenced the research. These experiences include interactions with the women, the literature I read, the conferences I attended, and even the movies I watched, the news I read, and other day-to-day activities, such as conversations with colleagues, professors, friends and family. The following is a segment of my reflexive journal which helped me realize that my relatively privileged Canadian-Chinese background

hindered my ability to understand the women's reactions and subsequently adequately respond to their displeasure towards a comment that was made by prison staff:

Members of the Sisterhood are angry at [CSC staff] for disrespecting their culture...[CSC staff] referred to us as a cult. Members of the Sisterhood also feel that they have been unjustly blamed by [CSC staff] for spilling juice on the carpet in the Spiritual Room. They feel that they are being used as a scapegoat and that they are being disrespected. They want to bring [CSC staff] in and talk to her in a Circle. At first, I questioned the tactic because I was thinking that [CSC staff] might get defensive, walking into a room full of women. I suggested that the executive just talk to her, but they disagreed – everyone must be there; it's how healing works – that's what they told me.
(September 29, 2006)

Generally, it is more than one event that led to the development of an idea or realization. This interaction with the women triggered my reservations towards facilitating a focus group with the women. My uncertainty was reinforced at a conference, and finally a solution came to mind during a doctoral seminar on creative analytic practice (CAP).

Wanda's agreed to help me out with creating the drum song during the focus group. That idea came to me just on Monday during Diana's CAP presentation.It took me over a year to realize that somebody who's embedded within Aboriginal culture would be better off facilitating a focus group and now, I believe that the creation of a drum song would fit right into the context of the Sisterhood and perhaps be an emancipatory experience for the women...I want the women...to express themselves the way they feel most comfortable and obviously, as demonstrated with the incident on September 29, 2006, I don't come from their perspective and it's difficult for

me to understand where they're coming from. I do not share a similar culture or history with these women. (reflexive journal, November 2, 2006)

Writing in this study was used in its traditional form, a method of communicating the knowledge which was discovered, but it was also used as a tool for discovery and analysis.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged out of critical legal studies in response to the criticism that the field over looked and underplayed the role of race and racism in the construction of the legal foundation (Parker & Lynn, 2002). CRT is concerned with making visible the injustices of race and racism that are embedded within society and questions the effect of White supremacy over people of racial minority. CRT starts with the premise that race and racism are central in lived experiences and uses a discourse of liberation.

Aboriginal women are disproportionately represented in Canada's federal prisons. Furthermore, Aboriginal women are overrepresented in the maximum security prison population. In a recent statement by CSC (2006b), they report that in 2003, 46% of Aboriginal FSW were under maximum-security, 35% under medium-security, and 23% under minimum-security. The statement by CSC also highlights that the proportion of full parole applications reviewed by the National Parole Board is lower for Aboriginal offenders, due in part to high full parole waiver rates⁸, that parole is more likely to be revoked for Aboriginal offenders than non-Aboriginal offenders, and that overall, Aboriginal offenders have longer periods of incarceration than non-Aboriginal offenders. Despite years of task force reports, internal reviews, national strategies, partnership agreements and action plans. CSC

⁸ Subject to subsection 746.1 of the *Criminal Code*, subsection 140.3(2) of the *National Defence Act* and subsection 15(2) of the *Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act*, a portion of a sentence that must be served in prison before FSW can apply for day parole (when FSW are usually transferred to a half-way house) (Department of Justice Canada, 1992). Following day parole, FSW will generally apply for full parole (when FSW may return home, but must report to a parole officer in the community). However, a woman can choose not to apply for parole and subsequently be required to spend their entire sentence in prison until their warrant expires (which essentially means that they are released from the custody of CSC).

acknowledges that there has been no significant progress in improving the critical situation of Aboriginal offenders during the last 20 years. This study recognized that these experiences of incarceration were linked to systemic discrimination and attitudes based on racial and/or cultural prejudice, and that the low socio-economic status and history of substance abuse and violence across generations were rooted in over 500 years of oppression and control.

Race is a social and historically constructed framework in which one is forced to live. Currently, common perceptions of being Aboriginal include having issues with substance abuse and violence, living in low income housing, being poorly educated and requiring methods of control and discipline to inhibit their unconventional and unruly behaviour. It was hoped that this research would offer one small step towards the deconstruction of this conceptualization of Aboriginal and the creation of another that is valued and carried with pride. This process can be understood as hooks' (1992) description of decolonization, "a political process to...define ourselves in and beyond the act of resistance to domination, we are always in the process of both remembering the past even as we create new ways to imagine and make the future" (p. 5).

Experiential and situated knowledge are the foci of CRT (Parker & Lynn; Solozano & Yosso, 2002). According to Parker and Lynn, CRT argues for the eradication of racial oppression while recognizing that race is a social construct, and draws important relationships between race and other axes of domination such as gender and class. CRT can be understood as a methodology to consider how race and racism affect the foundation on which we interpret lived experiences. As the lives of those individuals on the margins of society are used as the main source of information and knowledge production, CRT offers an arena for these alternative experiences to be heard through alternative means that are embedded within cultural traditions.

It is especially important to note that as this study progressed the issue of culture, particularly Indigeneity, was emphasized as an important consideration, in addition to experiences related to gender, race, and class. Feminist inquiry and CRT have been criticized for their exclusion of Aboriginal considerations, particularly the colonized experiences of the past and present, and the ultimate reinforcement of Western ideologies. Specifically, feminist ideologies have been argued to perpetuate colonialist ideas of woman (Anderson, 2000; Monture-Angus, 1995). For instance, as Bonita Lawrence in Anderson further explains, “the feminist movement has too easily accepted the idea that because you need a certain degree of economic control over your life in a capitalist society, that having children can weaken you in that respect” (p. 273). CRT has been criticized for making invisible the presence of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing struggles for decolonization, and failing to realize the cultural extermination of Aboriginal communities. Lawrence and Dua (2005) contend that ongoing colonization shapes the way in which notions of race and racism are conceptualized. Specifically, these authors state that research “on the Americas fail[s] to raise let alone explore the ways in which [Aboriginal] identities have been articulated through colonization” (Lawrence & Dua, p. 128).

As indicated earlier, this study has taken into account Harding’s (1991) suggestion to redirect the analysis of women’s situation and the feminist agenda so that Aboriginal women’s experiences of oppression can be considered beyond that of simply sexism. Through a Frierian perspective, this study also recognizes the historical and ongoing experiences of colonization of Aboriginal peoples, thereby broadening the scope of CRT. However, it came to light towards the latter part of the study, following data collection and analysis, that the incorporation of Indigenous theory deepens the focus of Aboriginal experiences of oppression, and ultimately helps challenge colonialism in Canada. *Wasáse*, the Thunder Dance, “is a ceremony of unity, strength, and commitment to action” (Alfred, 2005,

p. 19), and is proposed by Alfred as a spiritual revolution and contention that offers an ethical and political vision for Aboriginal peoples. He describes *Wasáse* as a “culturally rooted *social* movement that transforms the whole of society and a *political* action that seeks to remake the entire landscape of power and relationship to reflect truly a liberated post-imperial vision” (original emphasis, p. 27).

Creative Analytic Practice

CAP is process that is both creative and analytic (Richardson, 2000). It diverges from conventional science in that the “product cannot be separated from the producer or the mode of production or the method of knowing” (Richardson, p. 930). CAP can be used in conducting action research, feminist inquiry and CRT because it assumes that the self is always present and cannot ever be entirely suppressed. With this assumption, it enables researchers to explore alternative methods of dialogue, interpretation and consciousness-raising.

In the form of a focus group, Aboriginal FSW in GVI, who effectively became co-researchers in this context, were able to experience a self-reflective and transformational process of self-creation through the writing of a drum song. As stated earlier, writing can be considered a process of discovery which encourages individuals to accept and nurture their own voices (Richardson). This process facilitated an exploration and expression as Aboriginal FSW in the past, present, and future. CAP complements the objectives of action research, feminist inquiry and CRT. The process-oriented nature of CAP provided the occasion for dialogue and the reconstruction of Aboriginal identity by exploring where they wanted to go as Aboriginals and first and foremost, as Aboriginal women. In addition, the context of this CAP is embedded within a cultural tradition, drumming. This cultural context helped provide a comfortable and safe background for race and racism to emerge at the

forefront of the discussion. A detailed description of this focus group will proceed in the methods section.

Methods and Analysis

Interviews with the Women

In May, June, and July of 2006, interviews were conducted with 19 members of the Sisterhood who identified with Aboriginal cultures. In other words, some had registered Indian status while others did not. These interviews were part of a larger study currently being conducted by Drs. Alison Pedlar (Principal Investigator), Susan Arai, and Susan Shaw. The interviews, which ranged from 30 to 120 minutes in length, were conducted in GVI and were digitally-recorded for the purpose of conducting a transcript-based analysis (Krueger, 1994). The purpose of the larger study was to examine the needs of FSW for rehabilitation and reintegration. Housing and other aspects of women's health and well-being, such as social supports, access to children, employment and personal health practices and coping skills were considered. In addition to the questions asked in the larger study, Aboriginal women were specifically asked about Healing and Drum Circles, Sweat Lodges and Elders (See Appendix A). Some probing questions included: Can you describe your experiences with the Sweat?, How has the Sisterhood affected your awareness of the Native culture?, and Do you expect to continue participating in these traditions upon your release?

Participants

A letter explaining the larger study and inviting their participation was sent out to all the women in the prison. Some participants in this study accepted this invitation while others were personally approached by myself or other women in the Sisterhood. All of the women interviewed were active members of the Sisterhood at some point during their period of incarceration.

Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 44 years. At the time of the interviews, I had known some of the women for as long as a year and a half, thereby contributing to the rapport required for establishing a trusting and empathetic relationship with research participants (Patton, 2002). There were also some participants whom I had known for only a short time, as in three to four weeks. In some instances, these interviews required some probing questions. When this occurred, the women generally began to speak of other women in GVI and their needs. The depth of discussions with the participants ranged from simple one sentence answers to life stories dating back to when they were children and offers to share their case file⁹.

Preliminary Analysis

The interview data, along with my observations that were recorded in my reflexive journal, were deconstructed into common themes through an open-ended process, which helped identify common experiences across the women's narratives. The preliminary analysis of this data followed Strauss' (1987) coding process, which involves open and axial. The computer software program, NVivo 2 was used to help manage these data. The women were not involved in this initial analysis due to issues of confidentiality. Because of the closed and relatively small community at GVI, anonymity was hard to maintain as women could have been easily identified based on comments about their family, their past or where they wanted to go. This preliminary analysis was used to inform the direction of the focus group.

Emerging understanding

The preliminary analysis suggested that engagement in cultural traditions in GVI contributed to the maintenance and restoration of identity for Aboriginal FSW. However, the data did not answer the question of how this process occurred. Thus, a deeper understanding of this process was required. I thought that collecting data during an intimate cultural

⁹ For the larger study and for this study, we did not and will not have formal access to the women's CSC files or

experience with the women and specifically asking the women *who they perceived themselves to be, in terms of their identity, intellectually, spiritually and psychologically, and what they wanted to become* would contribute to a better understanding of the meaning of their cultural experiences at GVI and the impact Aboriginal traditions and celebrations had on their identity development and healing. Data collection during the Sweat was not possible as it was understood that what happened during the Sweat had to stay within the circle of participants. Data collection could have occurred during the Pow Wows and/or Aboriginal Day celebrations; however, these events were quite large with over 100 participants from inside and outside the prison. Thus, it was eventually decided that a focus group would be conducted in the form of creating a drum song with the women. The focus group is discussed towards the end of this chapter.

As indicated in the presentation of findings in Chapter Four: Gaining Knowledge, the analysis following the focus group suggested that Aboriginal traditions did not contribute to the maintenance and restoration of Aboriginal identity for the women. Rather, the women's engagement with Aboriginal cultures and traditions contributed to their healing through the discovery and re-creation of Aboriginal identity. Further discussion of these findings can be found in Chapter Four.

Interviews with the "Staff"

As argued by Richardson (2000), there are many way in which to view the world. She proposes crystalization as an approach to gain a better understanding of what we are studying. "Crystalization," she observes, "provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic" (p. 934). Thus, it is important to understand the personal impact of Aboriginal cultural traditions and activities on those who are facilitating the

records. However, occasionally a woman will choose to disclose information that would be found in their CSC documents.

process as well as their perspectives on the impact of these events on women's healing and rehabilitation. Those individuals involved in facilitating included Wanda and her helper Delores (Sweat facilitators), Terri (Native Liaison at GVI), and Norma (the Elder at GVI). Two other individuals were asked but did not participate. One woman did not respond to the request. The other woman agreed to participate, but it was difficult to find a suitable time in her busy schedule. Through a semi-structured interview, participants were invited to share their perspectives regarding their own experiences with Aboriginal cultures and traditions, and their perspectives of the impact of these traditions on Aboriginal FSW. Please see Appendix B for the letter of invitation, and Appendix C for the interview guide. As the conversational nature of this discussion was grounded in an oral tradition, the interview guide was not as structured as some traditional qualitative data collection approaches.

The interviews were conducted at a convenient location for the "staff" member. Some occurred in GVI, while others took place in the individual's home or place of employment. Consent was received through the signing of a consent form (see Appendix D). The interviews, which were approximately 60 to 100 minutes in length, were digitally-recorded for the purpose of conducting a transcript-based analysis. When I invited Norma (Native Elder) and Terri (Native Liaison) to participate in the interview, after some discussion they decided that they wanted to do the interview together. They felt that the group interview would be beneficial as they worked closely together at the prison. The other two interviews were conducted one-on-one. All of the "staff" members had the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview.

During a few of our conversations, Norma expressed concern that the interviews and focus group were going to be recorded (reflexive journal, August 9, 2006). She explained that in the oral tradition, the information given and received is what was meant to be passed on according to the Creator. I explained my position as a graduate student and the requirements

of research. She stated that if the women were comfortable with being recorded, then it was their prerogative and recognized that they have grown up in a different tradition than her own. For her own interview, Norma encouraged me to remain grounded in my initial understandings of the interview (reflexive journal, March 12, 2007). During this conversation, Norma also said something to the extent that perhaps not recording their teachings was a mistake of the past because so many of their traditions have been lost. Following the completion of the chapter *Gaining Knowledge*, Norma had the opportunity to review and provide feedback on themes that were identified in the study and quotations from her interview which were used in the chapter.

Focus Group

The heart of critical theory is change. As previously discussed, action research involves an iterative process comprised of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Pedlar, 1995). The focus group emerged as a part of the cyclical action research process framing this study (see *Figure 1*, p. 70). Specifically, the focus group questions stemmed from an initial analysis of the data collected and observations, which led to a desire to better understand the processes involved. The development of the focus group questions was done in collaboration with my co-facilitator, Wanda, to ensure that this process was congruent with and respectful of Aboriginal traditions and cultures. The idea of the focus group was presented to the women and discussed primarily as a drum song workshop. The women understood that this was for the purpose of the research project. Most of the women were keen to participate and contribute to the research. One woman was sceptical, stating that it would be too difficult, but agreed to try with the encouragement of the other women (reflexive journal, March 12, 2007).

Originally, I intended the focus group to also be an occasion for a formal discussion on the preliminary interpretations of the data. However, following my meeting with Wanda to

discuss the format of the focus group, it was decided that this kind of discussion would not fit with the atmosphere required for the creation of the Drum Song (reflexive journal, March 19, 2007). Rather, I would engage in informal discussions with women about the findings. This informality would allow the women more flexibility in deciding their level of engagement during the analysis of the data. Thus, the purpose of the focus group was to provide a formal occasion for further collection of data. Initial analyses from the interviews with the women indicated that more investigation was required, particularly with respect to the women's identity.

There were two parts to the focus group (see Appendix E). The first entailed a discussion of three questions which centred around the women's identity. The questions were 1) *Who are you in GVI?* 2) *How do you think the prison authorities see you?* and 3) *What do you want to be when you grow up?* To incorporate the holistic perspective of Aboriginal peoples, the women were encouraged to think about these questions spiritually, emotionally, physically, and intellectually, both in the context of their overall life experiences and their experiences in GVI. The second part of the focus group consisted of the creation of a drum song. While all of the participants have had the opportunity to review the drum song with me, the lyrics of the drum song (see p. 1) will be presented to each member of the Sisterhood as part of the letter of appreciation I shall be providing in an attempt to ensure the women know how much we learned from their engagement in this study¹⁰. With the permission of CSC and the women, the focus group was digitally-recorded for transcription and further analysis. The focus group occurred on April 16, 2007, during a Sisterhood meeting, from 6:00pm to 9:00 pm. Pizza and soft-drinks were provided as a thank you to the women for their involvement.

Participants

All members of the Sisterhood were invited to participate in the focus group. A verbal invitation was made to the women at a Sisterhood meeting and personal invitations were made by myself to the women who were not active members (see Appendix F). Thirteen women participated in the focus group. Five of these women also participated in the interviews. There was almost a year in between the interviews and the focus group. Some of the women who participated in the interviews had been released, others had been transferred or had their security levels increased to maximum, and some simply did not wish to partake in the focus group. In keeping with the Native tradition, tobacco was given and received by the women at the beginning of the focus group as an agreement for their collaboration¹¹. In compliance with the suggestion of the office of Ethics, the women were given the choice between receiving tobacco as an indication of their consent or signing a consent form (see Appendix G). All of the women chose to accept the tobacco.

There were a variety of Aboriginal nations represented by the women in the focus group. Such nations included Ojibwa, Cree, Mi'kmaq, Mohawk and Inuvik. As argued by Lawrence (2003),

A common identity was imposed on Indigenous populations when settler governments in North America usurped the right to define Indigenous citizenship, reducing the members of hundreds of extremely different nations, ethnicities, and language groups to a common racial identity as “Indian”...Contemporary Native identity therefore exists in an uneasy balance

¹⁰ This letter of appreciation will honour the women's involvement and include anonymous quotations which illustrate the women's experiences of healing, empowerment and re-creation.

¹¹ Tobacco is believed to be the most powerful of the four sacred plants of Aboriginal people (the other three being sweetgrass, cedar, and sage). It is offered when requesting assistance or information, as it is used to recognize the wisdom others have and to open the pathway for communicating this wisdom. Tobacco is also used as an expression of gratitude. The tobacco offering and acceptance was essentially a representation of my contract with the women to honour their confidentiality, and their agreement to freely participate in the study, take part in discussions and the creation of the Drum Song.

between concepts of generic “Indianness” as a racial identity and of specific “tribal” identity as Indigenous *nationhood* (original emphasis, p. 5-6).

In contrast to Lawrence’s argument that Indigenous people focus on rebuilding the nations that existed prior to colonization, the women’s experiences in the Sisterhood focused on re-discovering Aboriginal cultures in general. While the women did not demonstrate a resistance to learning about the culture and traditions of specific nations, they were content with learning about a wide range Aboriginal cultures and traditions. Most of the traditions were based in Ojibwa traditions because the Native Elder was Ojibwa¹². This approach may be because the Sisterhood existed in a government-based institution, which thus continued to confine its activities to bodies of law that define and control the Aboriginal identity. Another reason for the women’s focus on a common Aboriginal identity may come from the original intentions of the Sisterhood, which was for Aboriginal FSW to come together and maintain their distinct identity and exercise their right to practice Aboriginal cultures and traditions (Native Sisterhood Constitution, 2003). Given that the distinct identity and needs of Aboriginal FSW were once invisible in federal correctional system, progress has arguably been made with the women’s ability to experience some form of Aboriginal culture and tradition during their incarceration. Perhaps the next step will be in rebuilding the individual nations and individual cultures and traditions that were lost in the process of colonization.

Analysis Continued

In accordance with CAP, the creation of the drum song incorporated analysis of data and the final product comprised the interpretation and representation of the collaborators’ meanings and experiences as Aboriginal FSW. The data from the focus group provided an opportunity to synthesize the women’s voices in the creation of the drum song, but it may

¹² While some women indicated a desire to learn more about their personal Aboriginal nation, they understood that Norma offered them everything she could in her capacity of an Ojibwa grandmother.

have unwittingly presented some limitations as individual and diverging opinions may have been overshadowed. Notably, there were two occasions where the discrepancy between the women's perspective was noticeable. One was in reference to the lyrics, *We'll keep our spirits free*, which is further discussed in the presentation of data (p. 120). The other was in relation to the overall direction of the song. While talking about their ability to find freedom, some women began to focus on negative experiences and how they would prevail, while others wanted to focus on the action that would lead them to a sense of liberation. The discussion went as follows:

Wanda: Ok, so definitely the first verse is working and so is this, "*We'll keep our spirits free.*"

Shannon: [working on the next verse] "And if we"- let's do a brainstorm from here

Joanne: Get lost. [laughter]

Shannon: "And if we"- "

Ruth: And if our hearts break down? Or, do we want something more upbeat?

Deb: I think we should say something along the lines of, we're going to get free. Like, if we do something, we'll get there.

...

Shannon: Yeah, and so, "If we"- "

As indicated in the conversation above, the women would work out their differences on their own when divergent perspectives became evident. While certain opinions may have been lost in the collective and collaborative process, the drum song was considered an important representation of the transformative process of experiencing reflection, action, and voice.

As portrayed in the following chapter, excerpts from the women's suggestions for the drum song were used as guiding concepts in the data analysis. For example, "*Our scars are*

deep” was meant to represent the importance of the women’s past during the development of the song. These lyrics were not used in the actual composition of the song, but discussion by the women underscored the importance of history and the trauma experienced in the women’s lives. Notably, the women’s lyrics coincided with Freire’s (2000a) theory of liberation in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Data analysis continued to follow Strauss’ (1987) coding process of selective coding. That is, lyrics in the women’s drum song and guiding concepts in Freire’s (2000a) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* served as a foundation for the analysis. These concepts merged effortlessly with the themes and patterns that occurred in the open and axial coding (Strauss, 1987) processes that occurred in the preliminary analysis of the interviews and informal conversational exchanges. Freire’s components of transformation, such as the importance of historical consciousness and praxis, helped me understand the women’s processes of healing, empowerment, and re-creation, and ultimately organize these themes into a chronological pattern that depicted their experiences. As illustrated in *Figure 1* (p. 70), the identification of these themes were grounded in an iterative a cycle of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and analyzing. The computer software program, NVivo 7 was used to help manage these data¹³. Six major themes were identified: 1) history, 2) conscientização, 3) healing, 4) re-creation, 5) coming home, and 6) building the *Red Road*. The development of these themes best represent Aboriginal FSW’s experiences with healing through Aboriginal traditions within GVI, and the impact it had on their desires for change and the re-creation of Aboriginal identity.

¹³ An updated version of NVivo, from NVivo 2 to NVivo 7, was acquired in the time between the interviews and the focus group.

Chapter Five: Gaining Knowledge

*I'm 28 years old. I'm a mother, a daughter and a sister.
The system considers me a violent criminal and a convict,
[but] I've never been so free in all my life.
I've had an awakening in my perception...
I'm ignorant to the traditions of my ancestors and since becoming incarcerated...
I've been seeking knowledge on these traditions.
And just making contact with them just being with the sisters,
the Native sisters, brings strength and it's helped me in healing—
the healing and the shift in my perception.
- Cassandra*

This chapter presents six major themes identified through the iterative process of data gathering and analysis. The themes are 1) history, 2) conscientização, 3) healing, 4) re-creation, 5) coming home, and 6) travelling the *Red Road*. During the final stages of analysis the themes evolved into a chronological pattern that is portrayed in Cassandra's narrative; from a history of oppression to experiences of liberation in the prison through healing, re-creating an Aboriginal identity and a return to traditions of the past, to a desire to continue travelling the *Red Road* upon release. This gaining of knowledge through the data analysis process was largely informed by Freire (2006a, 2006b) and his pedagogy of the oppressed and pedagogy of hope.

Freedom, according to Freire (2006a), "is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly" (p. 47). Women's experiences with traditional ceremonies in prison provided the opportunity for critical awareness of their marginalized position in society and the systemic structures of oppression that brought them there. Freire contends that this critical awareness is required for liberation. The discussion in the first theme, *history*, focuses on the lives of oppression that were portrayed in the women's descriptions of their experiences. The continued impact of residential schools was revealed as the women re-counted the cold demeanour of their parents and how it affected their own lives. As noted by Haig-Brown (1998), in addition to the widely publicized sexual abuse

endured by so many of the students at residential schools, “First Nations languages, spiritual beliefs, and entire cultural competencies were negated” (p. 11). She further contends that “[c]hildren learn parenting skills by the way they are parented...In the same way that their language use is based on the knowledge they gained before going to school, so their parenting skills must draw on limited experience” (p. 122-123).

The destruction of familial bonds, the near annihilation of their culture, and memories of shame and embarrassment associated with being Aboriginal were some of the painful experiences of oppression that bonded Aboriginal FSW in *conscientização*. In other words, discovering similar experiences of oppression with other Aboriginal peoples in prison, and engaging in collective experiences through the Native Sisterhood facilitated resistance against the systemic structures of oppression that placed and continued to keep Aboriginal FSW along the margins of society. This resistance was rooted in the transformation of reality through *conscientização*. Freire (2006a) argues that liberation requires both reflection and action. Without action there is hopelessness and despair (Freire, 2006b), and without reflection there is meaninglessness (Freire, 2006a). The women’s experiences with the Sisterhood became a context for *praxis*, which included both reflection and action (Freire, 2006a). Through *praxis*, Aboriginal FSW collectively reflected on their experiences of oppression through dialogue and began a movement of change through engagement in ceremony and advocacy for Aboriginal rights in prison. The women’s experiences of *conscientização* developed into multiple processes of personal and collective transformation. These processes of transformation are explained in discussions under the themes *healing, re-creation, and coming home*.

The third theme, *healing*, discusses the personal healing journeys of the women. In particular, healing was conceptualized as love and self-understanding and thus required a safe and secure foundation from which to grow. The panoptical eye of the correctional system

clearly inhibited such an environment, but the women were able to find a sense of safety and security in the Sweat Lodges and in their relationships with Native Elders. This conceptualization of healing is founded in an Aboriginal philosophy of justice, which emphasizes reparation and reconciliation (TFFSW, 1990). An Aboriginal philosophy of justice involves a process which begins with encouragement and faith. While *healing* emphasizes the individual journey of Aboriginal FSW, the themes *re-creation* and *coming home* are considered as a result of collective efforts and experiences of solidarity.

Through ceremony, Aboriginal FSW found the strength to collectively engage in the re-creation of their cultural identity. Much like Freire (2006a) describes the emergence of a new person in the process of liberation, Aboriginal FSW's processes of liberation consisted of a new collective cultural identity. This identity development diverged from the shame and embarrassment typically associated with being Aboriginal. Lazy, drunken and dirty now had the potential to be replaced with confident, educated and strong. According to Freire, liberation is conceptualized as a painful process that leads to the emergence of a new person. The process was painful because the women had to recognize their experiences as experiences of oppression and marginalization. However, through the anger, the strife and eventual healing, the women became aware of their incompleteness, and thus recognized the possibility for transformation. The re-creation of identity is founded in a critical awareness that people exist in an unfinished reality and that they have the potential to change their reality (Freire). Freire states, "To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it" (p. 88, original emphasis). In the re-creation of Aboriginal identity, Aboriginal FSW went from positions of *surviving* in an oppressive society to *existing* in the re-writing of this reality.

Ceremonies also represented going back to cultural traditions that were once made illegal by the Indian Act. Data regarding this idea of returning to lost traditions is discussed under the theme *coming home*. Coming home represents a return to Aboriginal roots and

traditions that were used as social mechanisms that provided structure, order, and a sense of well-being for the Aboriginals (Cole, 1993; Dyck, 1983). From some Aboriginals, the journey home began with the first attempts of resistance when children, such as eight-year-old Duncan Sticks, ran away from residential schools (Furniss, 1995). Duncan Sticks was one of nine boys who ran away in February 1902 from Williams Lake Residential School, British Columbia. The other eight boys were captured and returned to the school; Duncan was found dead the next day, thirteen kilometers from the school (Furniss).

For others, resistance efforts against the forces of colonization began during the earliest attacks on European settlers, such as the attack of the Iroquois in 1649 on French priests. The priests were the ones the Iroquois felt were responsible for the destruction of their country (Francis, Jones, & Smith, 2000). Regardless of the method of resistance, it is evident that the journey home for Canada's first people consisted of centuries of oppression and resistance. Consequently, the traditions and cultural elements which comprised "home", to some extent, were forgotten, and were thus new and foreign for many Aboriginal peoples. For the majority of the Aboriginal FSW, this homecoming represented a cultural re-birth. Their journey home ultimately developed into a *politics of difference* and a proud awareness of their inherent right as Aboriginals to participate in ceremony and develop and grow as Aboriginal peoples. According to Young (1995), the politics of difference "offers an understanding of social relations without domination in which persons live together in relations of mediation among strangers with whom they are not in community" (p. 234). For those who adopt a politics of difference, conformity for social wholeness and unity are not required.

The process of liberation has just begun for Aboriginal FSW. Experiences of healing, growth and development as Aboriginal peoples began with the return of ceremony in prison. Freedom requires persistent action and reflection (Freire, 2006a). For conscientização and

liberation to continue upon their release, Aboriginal FSW must be given the tools and the resources required to further their journey on the *Red Road*. Furthermore, liberation requires the oppressed to move from spectators to actors (Freire, 2006a), and thus be builders of the *Red Road* and builders of their future. As Freire (2006b) contended, humanity involves “historically, culturally and socially *existing*” (p. 83, original emphasis). Humans, he continued, are “makers of their ‘way,’ in the making of which they lay themselves open to or commit themselves to the ‘way’ that they make and that therefore remakes them as well” (p. 83). The final theme identified in this gaining of knowledge discusses the importance of having access to Aboriginal resources and supports in the community for Aboriginal FSW upon release. Despite the women’s ability to find strength and solidarity in prison, most acknowledged that there will be limited supports for them to continue this growth in the community. Aboriginal resources and support are virtually unavailable due to centuries of oppression that have brought the Aboriginal culture to near annihilation, and the discriminatory attitudes towards convicted offenders in the Aboriginal community. Furthermore, when resources and support were in place beyond the prison, Aboriginal FSW had difficulties accessing it— a direct outcome of their institutionalization.

In the following paragraphs I shall present the data from which the above themes are developed. Pseudonyms are used throughout the presentation of the data to protect the FSW’s anonymity and identity. However, as requested by the four “staff” participants (Norma, Terri, Wanda, and Delores) pseudonyms were not used for these particular women. It is also important to mention that Norma, Terri, Wanda, and Delores were Aboriginal women who worked closely with the women. As noted earlier, Norma was the Native Elder at the prison, Terri was the Native Liaison, Wanda was the Spiritual Advisor who came in to the prison to facilitate the Sweat Lodges and Delores was her helper. The perspectives of these women contributed immensely to the gaining knowledge as they often provided further explanation

of the women's understanding and knowledge of their experiences. For example, I was extremely curious to understand why women rarely mentioned returning to the reserve. It was not until I engaged in discussions with these individuals that I realized most Aboriginal FSW have never lived on a reserve. Furthermore, the personal experiences of the four "staff" were important to consider throughout the analysis, since much of their lives contained the oppression and control experienced by Aboriginal FSW.

History - "Our scars are deep"

According to Freire (2006a), the process of liberation must begin with the human-world relationship. He argues that liberation "constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene. Once started from this situation— which determines their perception of it— can they begin to move" (p. 85). A deepened consciousness requires that individuals understand their experiences in an historical context. Researchers, such as Faith (2006) and Sugar and Fox (1990), contend that the lives of Aboriginal FSW are filled with experiences of oppression. The women I met, who felt able to share some of their painful past, are no exception. When women talked about their alcoholism, they mentioned the alcoholism of their parents. When women spoke about their crime, they recalled the racism they had encountered when they were young. As the women's experiences were grounded in an understanding of their personal history of oppression, it can be argued that the women were at *the point of departure* from their positions of subjugation.

According to Freire (2006a), the point of departure is "the movement which engages people as beings aware of their incompleteness" (p. 84), which then leads individuals to realize that their reality is susceptible to transformation. As previously mentioned, prison can be considered another institution used for the assimilation and control of Canada's First Nations (Faith, 2006; Haig-Brown, 1998; Sugar & Fox, 1990; TTFSW, 1990). The women's descriptions of their past were deeply rooted in the effects of the Indian Act and evidence of

the continued wake of destruction which persists well after the closure of residential schools. Women's experiences of prison parallel the control and domination experienced in residential schools. Foucault (1995) suggests prison facilitates the production of delinquency. This development of delinquents creates two distinct classes, which reinforces a social order based on the social construction of the powerful and the powerless.

Foucault's (1995) analysis of prison also suggests that it is a disciplinary space divided into as many sections as there are bodies. This division is intended to avoid the formation of groups and collective dispositions. However, changes in the system, which were based on the recommendation of *Creating Choices*, have provided the opportunity for collective groups to form. CSC's efforts to promote the creation of meaningful choices facilitated the development of Commissioner's Directives such as the one on Aboriginal programming, which enabled Aboriginal women to come together and realize their collective history of oppression.

As suggested in the above analytical comments on the themes found in the women's narratives, many women discussed a history of alcoholism, racism and trauma, which began at a very young age. As Shannon candidly stated,

I started drinking and stuff when I was five years old because my father was an alcoholic...I was a very bad, rebellious teenager and I...just basically existed, so I didn't get the love and support and coddling that I really needed. My mom never had time for that. My dad was only disciplinary.

In the same regard, Joanne commented,

My mother found it really hard to work and try and be a mother because she was in a residential school, right? So, she didn't know how to be loving and kind... [My parents] were both strict and so cold.

Unfortunately, a harsh environment was typical for these women; there was no other place to find the love and kindness they were so desperately seeking. As Joanne continued, schools were also a battleground for survival,

I was telling you it was really hard to be Native in that society because the place where we lived was an all-White, high end of Regina. The school that we went to was all White, there was only one other Native family there. It was bad, because kids can be so mean. We'd get chased to home and we were called all kinds of names and stuff like that.

There was no surprise when Joanne concluded this part of her story with, “*I left home at a pretty young age*”. While many of these women escaped the life at home, they continued to move along the margins of society and, as described by Moira, become entrenched in a life of crime, “*I distrusted most of the White children. They were rude, mean and that's how I ended up in jail, cuz of my childhood. I started fighting back physically. I was tired of being pushed around*”. While reflecting on this common pathway to crime among Aboriginal FSW, Norma commented that for some of these women, the only space they can find a place to belong is along the margins of society:

I don't think people realize this, but when you come off of reserves just what an unfriendly atmosphere the city is. Nobody wants to rent you a room in a decent building. And, when you rent a room, the person that rents you the room thinks that he has the right to do anything he wants to you. And pretty soon...the only other people wanting you are the other people on the street...And, they end up on the wrong side of the law.

In the struggle to survive, most of these women have limited options and the options they have are generally choices that continue to facilitate a life of oppression and domination. The structural oppression of Canada's first people have left them without knowledge of their

traditions and who they are. Joanne's recollection of an exchange she had with her parents demonstrated the "accomplishment" of residential schools in fostering a sense of shame and disgrace towards Aboriginal culture:

When I was a little girl, I had a couple friends who danced Pow Wow and I asked my parents if I could do that. You know, there was something that was really pulling me towards this culture and they said no. My father said that that's not a good way of life.

This sense of shame resulted in the ultimate loss and destruction of Aboriginal culture, particularly for the generation of children who were born of those who attended residential school. Some of these children grew up without any knowledge of their cultural heritage because parents, much like Joanne's, would attempt to dissuade their children from learning about Aboriginal traditions and culture. The difficulty in exploring Aboriginal culture was reiterated by Delores, whose comment suggested that even when individuals may want to learn about Aboriginal culture, they may not find the means to educate themselves. She stated, "*Up North [in Ontario], the traditional component...was very, very rare and hard to find... Even still, like even on my home reserve it's really hard to find traditional people*".

As previously discussed, Canada's prisons are similarly characterized by the experiences of domination in residential schools (Faith, 2006; Haig-Brown, 1998; Sugar & Fox, 1990; TTFSW, 1990). Some of my own experiences with the women in prison, reminded me of the studies I had read about the experiences of those who went to residential schools. Interactions with the women, particularly surrounding Tim Horton's coffee and doughnuts, reminded me of the descriptions regarding breakfast at William's Lake Residential School in Haig-Brown's study (1998). The women's experiences with mediocre coffee seemed to parallel the children's experiences with the porridge they ate. Power and control were exercised through the unequal distribution of food and drink. The children's

porridge was generally prepared the day before, whereas food for the staff was prepared just before serving. One of former students of the school explained, “They [staff] didn’t eat the same food we ate; they ate much better food. We had mush and they had bacon and eggs” (p. 61). In a journal entry, I remarked that the women spent over ten minutes talking about Tim Horton’s coffee and doughnuts during a Sisterhood meeting (February 16, 2007). Then, there was another incident regarding Tim Horton’s coffee after a Sweat in July 2007. The Sweat was exceptionally hot that night and it completely drained my energy. I wrote:

As I was leaving the prison after a Sweat, a woman, who knew I had an hour drive ahead of me, suggested I go get a Tim Horton’s coffee. I told her I probably shouldn’t because then I’d be up all night. She laughed and told me to do it for her: An extra large, double, double. I said I’d consider it. Two weeks later, I saw her again and she asked if I had the coffee. Ever since, every time I see her, she asks for her Tim Horton’s coffee (August 14, 2007).

Notably, the guards always have Tim Horton’s coffee. They drink it at their work stations and the women see them drinking it. When I walk into the prison, personnel from CSC will often be coming back with a round of coffees for other employees. While at first I found the women’s slight obsession with Tim Horton’s coffee and doughnuts merely amusing, I have come to equate the women’s desire for Tim Horton’s coffee with that of the children desire for quality breakfast food at William’s Lake Residential School. Power and authority are reinforced and displayed in the inequity of food distribution. The staff and guards have the better food and drink and overtly display this privilege, while the children and FSW must watch and are forced to accept the mediocre quality of what they can access. Those individuals who are in positions of subjugation are left with feelings of powerlessness.

Gaining knowledge helped to illuminate the characteristics of prison life such that structurally it stood as another institution of the injustices of colonization. This was reiterated by Norma in her description of what she tells the women upon their arrival at the prison:

What people don't realize is that the prison system, we've always lived in. Ever since the newcomers came, when they threw a perimeter on the reserves, we weren't allowed to leave, so that was a prison...so we just got used to that and they took [the children] all away to Residential school, which was a prison for children...It's like, "Hey there a fence! This is just like home on a reserve".

Sadly, in the same way the children of Davis Inlet have resorted to gas-sniffing to escape their pain and suffering (Rogan, 2001), the women in Canada's prisons were slashing and participating in other acts of self-harm. In the following passage, Joanne recalled what prison-life was like in Prince Albert Penitentiary, Saskatchewan prior to the changes initiated by *Creating Choices*:

We were always at odds with the staff and there was always a lot of assaults and there was so much anger there. That's why women were slashing out [self-mutilating]. So, you know they'll bring in a psychologist, but she was of a different race...and so that wasn't going to help because no one was seeing her.

The women's scars of oppression are as deep as those left on Aboriginal peoples when the Europeans first arrived. According to Wanda, "*When we [Aboriginals] look at the history of Canada...we always look at colonization and oppression*". In some sense, as reflected in the dialogue between Norma and Terri, living in an oppressive state is the only life Aboriginal FSW have lived:

Norma: I think you can get used to this kind of living and it becomes your life.

Terri: Yeah, they [Aboriginal FSW] become so institutionalized they don't want to go out there [into the community].

Norma: Because we've been institutionalized for 500 years. It's hard to break the mold.

With the recommendations in *Creating Choices*, it is important to acknowledge that major changes have occurred in Canada's federal women's prisons and that these changes are beneficial to the women. Deb discussed the importance of being able to practice her cultural traditions in the prison, she stated:

I mean, to me [experiences rooted in my Aboriginal culture] is everything. My Elder and you know, to me without that, it only leaves the structured CSC...I think [if] people like Norma, and my Elders weren't available, and the Talking Circles and all that stuff it would make it [incarceration] a lot more difficult for me.

Furthermore, as Norma reminisced:

Years ago...there was one time a question in Corrections that said, "Why don't Indians do that early release program where they go home"...It was because they had a guard and you see how it reinforced their idea of how an Indian is. The house is poor, the house is not as clean, how come everybody's home and there's not much food. They don't offer to feed you, they're embarrassed.

With the changes in CSC emanating from *Creating Choices*, there is now more support for Aboriginal women in Canada's federal prisons. The Elder will often take women out on escorted temporary absences to visit their families or to go to drumming and talking circles in the community. However, even with these changes, women continued to experience effects of colonization. Prison protocol and the emphasis on criminogenic factors, such as addictions

and anger and emotional management, continue to overshadow the holistic tradition of Aboriginal healing. As illustrated by Danielle, even though she personally wanted to participate in the Aboriginal programming, substance abuse and formal education were understood as priorities for release:

I haven't been able to [participate in Circles of Change or Spirit of a Warrior] because ...I've only just recently finished my WOSAP [Women Offender's Substance Abuse Program] so I wasn't available to do anything different on a Friday or a Monday...it's 4 mornings a week and you cannot miss any...it has to come up now where I've actually got a full schedule with my school. It's what I'm getting right now, it's schooling.

While CSC's policies may have improved since the inception of *Creating Choices*, Aboriginal FSW experiences remain controlled and contrived.

The manipulation and control of Aboriginal peoples have left them in positions of confusion, shame, and loss of identity. As Shannon asserted, *"It's an identity thing for sure. There was a time where I would never tell anybody else that I'm Native"*. The women's Native culture was consistently hidden and purposefully overshadowed by another way of life, most often the predominant White culture. Shannon continued to say, *"I was raised a Catholic. My father's the full blooded Native, but we grew up in Catholic environment, I went to a Catholic school. And now, in my adult life I'm very confused"*. Doris' observations suggested that loss of culture and identity was a consequence of Aboriginal peoples' oppressive history:

A lot of women don't know their culture when they come inside... It's not...that it's their fault. It's because they were never given that insight...of the Native way. And either they were in foster homes or they got involved with, you know,

urbanized communities or they've been segregated from their communities, and the reserves for whatever reason, or shunned.

For many of the women, being Native was synonymous with being “*lazy and dumb*” (Joanne). This stigma was further complicated by the Indian Act; the government policy that essentially stated who was Indian. As Norma argued, “*If anybody left the reserve and got an education, they were automatically disenfranchised. They weren't Indian any longer*”. Thus at one time, if a woman were to get an education and resist the stigma of being labelled lazy and dumb, she would also be relinquishing her culture and identity as a Native person.

Some women, such as Joanne, recognized the impact of the oppressive history of their people and the need to change that history. When asked about her healing journey, Joanne replied:

Well, first off going back to look at who I am and identifying myself as a Native person, because saying that I was Native as a kid was very shameful. You could look at me and know that I was Native, dark skin and that was something that was very embarrassing. So, going back and being able to say that I am Native and being proud of it.

Most women enter the prison ashamed of being Native and not knowing their own culture. At one level of analysis, life in prison for Aboriginal FSW is merely the continuation of their systemic oppression of the past. However, at another level of analysis, incarceration also facilitated a gathering of oppressed and the potential for the development of solidarity and liberation. This is further explained in the following theme *conscientização*.

Conscientização - “*We'll keep our Spirits Free*”

According to some researchers such as Bloom and Covington (1998), the criminal justice system is designed to discourage women from coming together and forming relationships of support and encouragement. While this analysis continues to be evident in the

practices of discipline and surveillance of Canada's correctional system, opportunities through the inclusion of Aboriginal traditions have allowed for the collective gathering of women. This gathering contributed to opportunities for education through meaningful communication. According to Freire (2006a), conscientização consists of a deepening sense of critical awareness of the world. He argues that this awareness is generated through dialogue with others; a process that can turn meaninglessness into meaningful, oppression into freedom, and control and manipulation into joint responsibility and commitment to one another.

The women emphasized the importance of dialogue and immense value in learning about their culture and heritage. This personal desire to learn coincides with Freire's (2006a) contention that the potential for conscientização lies in the people themselves. As Wanda observed and conveyed to the women during a discussion of the lyrics to the women's drum song, "*That's what you do [keep your spirits free] ...Your Spirits are free, even though your bodies are here [in prison]*". The discussion was based around the last line in a verse. The first two lines in the verse were "*The sky above, the land below*". Essentially, the women were deciding if they would choose the words "*We'll keep our spirits free*", implying they were the ones responsible for their freedom, or "*Will keep our spirits free*", implying that nature—the land and the sky, would keep their spirits free. In the end, they chose the former.

Conscientização is a collective experience that occurs in dialogue and creation with others. According to Freire (2006a), "Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (p. 79). The women's conversation with others provided occasions for reflection, and the creation of ceremonies and the advocacy of Aboriginal rights provided opportunities for action. According to Freire (2006a),

The important thing, from the point of view of libertarian education, is for the people to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking

and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades (p. 124).

He further explains that knowledge alone will not affect change (2006b). Engagement is also required in this process of transformation, for without action there is hopelessness and despair.

“Our journeys wide”

In accordance with Freire (2006a), the process of conscientização emphasized the importance of dialogue and efforts to fight for their collective rights. For many of the women, such as Shannon, much of their experiences of consciousness stemmed from an intrinsic desire to learn:

I made this choice; to continue talking... it can be a Circle or a sweat lodge where I go. If I find it, great, but I hate it when it's ordered for me... it all starts with me. Where do I come from? Who am I? Why has all these things happened to me? Why am I doing these things? So these are questions I ask myself. If go find out more about my cultural background, my people, my parents, then I might be able to answer those questions for myself.

Women placed great importance in having discussions with an Elder. Elders were described as guides and an inspiration to their lives. As Deb explained:

Norma [the Elder in the prison] would just talk to me about how it is out here and, you know, she gave me an ear. She was always there to listen and she was always there to, to not do it for me but to, give me direction if I needed it, you know? She's always been very inspirational.

Notably, the role of the Elder was to listen and be an inspiration, as opposed to declaring how things should be done. In congruence with Freire's (2000a) conceptualization of conscientização, discussions between Elders and the women have the potential to turn

meaninglessness into meaningful. In other words, human life finds meaning through communication.

Understanding comes from education. The kind of education described by the women is not the contemporary concept of education that Freire (2006a) describes as the *banking concept*, which occurs when subordinates are expected to receive, memorize and repeat information. Freire concludes that there is no dialogue within this system of learning. Consequently, the knowledge received becomes bits of meaningless information without of any sense of reality. Rather, this process of education is related to liberation. As Terri expressed, “*Native people [are] arming themselves with education...we’re educating ourselves, we’re speaking up.*” According to Norma:

Once our people learn how the people think, you can follow the pattern, but you can still keep your things in there and we can learn that. Every bit of learning we do gives you a theory, a method and a way of doing things...I don’t think any kind of knowledge is bad for you...But, I’d like to think we can trust [the women] to make those decisions what works for them.

Inherent within this process of liberation is the recognition of human agency; that each individual has the capacity to reflect, adopt, reject or alter the knowledge presented. This approach to education resonates with Freire, who states that authentic thinking occurs only in communication.

Learning in general is highly valued by all those involved in this process, that being both the Native facilitators and the women. “*It’s part of the healing journey*” explained Shannon, “*so, constantly learning and constantly having an open mind*”. Notably, this style of learning encompassed a belief that the world is not static, that it is constantly changing. As Freire (2006a) argues, transformational character of reality necessitate[s] that education be an ongoing activity (p. 84). He continues by stating, “a deepened consciousness of their situation

leads people to apprehend their situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation” (p. 85). The importance of learning about the oppressive history of Aboriginal peoples was often emphasized. As Norma explained her role of a Native Elder, she stated:

[Elders] carry teachings from since the beginning of time...so, it's like being historians. Our history isn't written properly according to our way of thinking...I remind our young ladies of [how] times have changed our history and all those different steps to bring us where we are now.. That's what I hope...that they know that we weren't always the way that we're pictured now. That we were and we are good people, [and so they know] the reasons that we lost it and how we lost it. So, in reliving all those steps that happened to our family, they start understanding.

This understanding leads to the potential for transformation. Transformation is further examined in the sections *healing, re-creation* and *coming home*.

As previously discussed, prior to incarceration, the majority of Aboriginal women had little to no opportunity to explore their culture. Consequently, many of the women, such as Maria and Kayla, were gaining access to these traditions for the first time:

When I first came I didn't know nothing about drumming or singing or chanting or sweats or anything...when I experienced it here [in GVI] it just made me feel so relaxed and focused...it was like, “Wow, I feel so much better”. (Maria)

I have Native background, yes. I've never followed up on it...I've always wanted to learn more about it and coming here has kind of open me up to it. It's given me an opportunity to learn about it. (Kayla)

As emphasized by Ruth, many of the women expressed a sense of loss in their lives and identified their return to Aboriginal traditions as the missing piece:

When I came here [GVI], it taught me what I was looking for. There was fulfillment, there was self-gain, there was also a completeness...everything that I learned about my spirituality in-depth, I learned it through GVI.

For Doris, participation in traditional ceremonies was perceived as a crucial component of self-discovery:

It's helped me cope..and put myself on the positive path, yeah. You know, staying away from drugs. And it helps you become a better person, you know, it just helped me anyways, to understand myself and to respect myself.

According to Deb, who was one of the few who grew up in the Aboriginal tradition, the presence of traditional ceremony was central to the meaningful development of what it meant to be an Aboriginal woman:

If you grew up White and this [CSC] is all you know, then it's fine. But if you didn't grow up that way, and that's taken away, it's like your identity is being taken away with it.

According to Monique, Aboriginal traditions and the Sisterhood contributed to her growth as an individual and helped her resist becoming, as termed by Foucault (1995), a docile body and a mindless cog in the correctional system:

The Sisterhood has really helped me grow spiritually... I'm looked at as a prisoner by the administration because we are in a women's prison. So, it's hard to be looked at as anything differently and it's hard to remain an individual in a situation like this. I've grown a lot spiritually attending the Sweat Lodges, the ceremony with Sisterhood every week.

"It starts with them and once they start to get rid of all that stuff that's kept in...they'll start to feel better", affirmed Terri, "They've got to start cleaning the closet and get all that stuff out and facing it".

Participation in Aboriginal traditions also gave the women an opportunity to resist the rules and regulations of the prison. Occasionally, the women would smoke tobacco in the Sweat Lodge. The Commissioner's Directive on Aboriginal Programming allows the use of traditional medicines, such as tobacco, during ceremony (CSC, 1995). However, smoking is not allowed inside any federal building (CSC, 2006d). On one occasion when the women were passing around a cigarette in the Sweat Lodge, some of them questioned what the authorities would say, since they were smoking inside institutional property. The women continued to smoke and began to joke with me about how I had better not tell the authorities (reflexive journal, March 12, 2007). Clearly, the women were enjoying the thought of participating in a ceremonial ritual that was, in essence, breaking a regulation imposed by CSC.

The women's process of *conscientização* was very much related to their process of healing as individuals and as a collective group. Individually, the women were able to release their anger and their pain. Together, the women were able to begin the creation of a new identity for Aboriginal women, which ultimately fostered a return to their culture and traditions. In other words, through the processes of healing and re-creating what it means to be Aboriginal, Aboriginal FSW began to realize that they did not necessarily have to be placed along the margins of society and that they had a right to participate in their traditional ceremonies and to be proud of who they were as Aboriginal peoples. The following three sections, healing, re-creation, and coming home, further explore these processes of transformation.

Healing – “*Our beliefs are strong*”

Healing in this study was conceptualized as a holistic process that involved the emotional, physical, mental and intellectual components of the self. The women's ability to heal was grounded in unconditional love, faith and encouragement experienced through

interactions with Elders and in ceremony, particularly the Sweat Lodge. Such interactions managed to escape the oppressive environment of the prison, which Foucault (1995) describes as a methodological and meticulous machine that controls and manipulates through constant coercion and surveillance. A sense of security and safety was created in ceremony through relationships of support and encouragement. Humanity was also restored through ceremony and the genuine and caring attitudes of Elders. While discipline produces subjected, docile bodies (Foucault), the process of healing permitted the women to feel and express their pain, anger and sadness. Healing involves sharing grief and sorrow, and disclosing traumatic experiences of the past as an effort to finally leave them behind (Ross, 1992). Healing also involves learning together *how* to speak and release the pain and other feelings that resulted from such events (Ross). This kind of disclosure mirrors Freire's (2006a) discussion of love as the foundation of dialogue. He argues that "love is an act of courage" (p. 89) and involves humility and faith. Eventually, this type of interaction becomes a dialogue of mutual trust (Freire). As portrayed in the data below, trusting relationships were evident in the women's descriptions of their relationships with Native Elders.

According to Wanda, healing is described as:

To be able to be kind to yourself and to someone else...To be able to recognize your weaknesses and your strengths...To be able to understand...that your emotions are as important around the medicine wheel as is your body, mind, spirit.

As indicated by Wanda, healing requires consideration for all aspects of the self— the physical, spiritual, intellectual and emotional. Depending on the individual, some components require more work than others. Most of the women spoke of their spiritual and emotional selves needing to heal the most. As Shannon revealed, "*My spiritual self and my emotional self [are] stuck cuz my abuse and all the other things that have happened... So, on a healing*

journey you try and work on those things". When asked what healing meant, Katie replied, *"Just the inner-self healing... people are searching their inner souls to find a different way of living, so that helps you set your mind differently for when you go out into the world"*. When working with the women, Terri stated, *"I try to get across that in order to love anybody else, they have to love themselves"*. Thus, healing for Aboriginal FSW is predominantly described as an individual process that involves the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical self.

Healing included understanding that anger is an emotion that is just as acceptable as any other. As Wanda argued, *"All emotions are good whether it's anger [or] sadness"*. Delores further explained, the women *"need to understand that anger is okay, and how you release your anger you know, where it's not going to hurt anybody else or themselves"*. The following illustration by Ruth portrayed the potential for healing and growth upon this realization:

Anger is a human instinct...Ever since I learned that skill of what you do when you feel anger, my life has been different. I'm charge free, I've been going to school, and I'm a unit rep. I just carry myself in a completely different manner.

Most of the women stated that they preferred to seek counselling from Native Elders, as opposed to certified professionals. Women, such as Deb, often described Elders as loving parents or grandparents, *"[Norma's] love; her feelings are not situational, you know, it doesn't matter what's going on. She's always there"*. In other words, Elders were a source of unconditional love and understanding. As Danielle described her relationship with Norma, she stated, *"She has a lot of wisdom to share with us...it's really good to talk to her. Just to that have that person that cares means so much."* Edna also emphasized the importance of being able to talk with people who genuinely cared,

A psychologist...they're more into diagnosing stuff...whereas, with an Elder, you can sit down and talk to them, and they can let their feelings get involved...it's relaxing...they're genuine, they care.

In the same regard, Deb argued, *"It's allowed me to be myself...to talk about my problems without feeling guarded, without having to feel like somebody's reporting up-front or is going to use it against me... that's made a world of difference to me"*. Furthermore, as Edna continued, the women's relationships with Elders were much more informal as they did not consist of the structure of oppression and control put forth by the correctional system:

If you need somebody to talk to, they're there to talk to. They don't tell you, "Oh, you need to book an appointment," or "I'll send you a pass," or anything like this. They don't tell you, "I'm going to write what you said up in a report".

"It's our traditional way of dealing with things," explained Norma as she spoke about the oral tradition of the Aboriginal culture. Unfortunately, at the time of this discussion, CSC had just mandated that the Native Elder and Liaison write an assessment for the women. Norma continued by stating, *"I'm having a really hard time with the assessment that I'm expected to do"*.

The conceptualization of healing as love and self-understanding stems from the Aboriginal philosophical belief of justice powered by encouragement and faith in the goodness that exists. In the same regard, healing required feelings of safety and security. As Delores illustrated, *"I think if you're talking you are healing. If you're sharing something about yourself which is painful, having the courage to actually say it is part of healing"*. Many of the women spoke about the Sweats they attended as a crucial part in their healing. The Sweat Lodge *"makes you think and it gets the evil out of ya,"* observed Meg, *"I think there is a spirit out there and I think that once you cleanse your soul, your spirit inside gets*

stronger". As Joanne's comments portrayed, a sense of safety and security were provided in the Sweat Lodge, which then enabled her to deal with her pent up hurt, anger and hatred:

It's like going into the womb of Mother Earth...If anything that's bothering me that I can't deal with outside of [the Lodge], I go in there and I let it all go...Like, there have been some things that I've really held on to for many years...I couldn't talk to any people about it and that's where I started dealing with the root of it. All my anger and hatred.

Similarly, Sheila testified, "It was really nice because it felt really safe. It felt like you weren't here [in prison]...it was pitch black so you could cry without anybody judging you".

Unfortunately, as Sheila's statement depicted, prison's inherent nature of surveillance and punishment does not provide an environment of security and safety. Delores further explained, the women "don't feel safe to share with anybody else... [The Lodge] is the only place where they can actually to some degree be who they are. Without judgment, without somebody reporting it, without it being written down". As I wrote in my reflexive journal:

There were a few new women at the Sweat. I saw one of the women who went to the Sweats regularly tell the new women something to the extent of Delores being the person who would take care of them if they got upset during the Sweat. The women's fears appeared to relax after essentially being told that the Sweat Lodge was a supportive environment; one of encouragement and kindness, as opposed to suspicion and apprehension (August 9, 2006).

Terri reinforced these observations with the following comment:

I think that's why they go to the Sweats because... they feel that they can release what they're feeling. They wouldn't have been able to do that in a psychologist's office. They first thing they're gonna do is, when they walk in [the psychologist's office], they're gonna feel stressed and tense.

A sense of safety and security were clearly difficult to find in prison. However, in addition to interactions with Native Elders, the Sweat Lodge was also identified as a place where the women could escape the panoptical gaze of the prison authorities. Furthermore, it was an experience that the women chose to participate in. There were no guards present and as indicated by participants, there were no reports made. As Wanda contended, the current system of corrections and incarceration is not conducive to healing. Rather, it focuses on the negative aspects of the individuals:

Instead of saying that we had to fix them, why can't we say that we have to help them. And locking them up and taking away their [freedom] ...It's like being sent to their room. It's still a punishment model.

Thus, while improvements have been made to the federal corrections system for women, surveillance and punishment continue to dominate the processes ostensibly designed for healing and rehabilitation of the women.

Re-creation - “*And when we sing, Our spirits soar, Like an Eagle above the trees*”

Freire (2006a) contends that libertarian education “affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*— as unfinished uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (p. 84). In this potential for change and process of becoming, Aboriginal FSW essentially re-created the meaning of Aboriginal.

Aboriginal FSW’s participation in ceremony was, at times, a form of resistance against oppressive force of the prison. It is through this resistance and engagement in ceremony that the women were able to experience some sense of liberation from being a passive spectator in society to becoming actor of creation with the world. In accordance with Freirian theory these collective acts of resistance and creation provided the women a sense of mastery and control and thus, liberation from positions of powerlessness. Collective engagement in ceremony fostered a respect and pride in their culture. The development of

respect and pride for being Aboriginal is essentially an outright rejection of the attitudes and behaviour that are forced upon Aboriginal peoples. European colonialists intended inferiority and immorality to be the images of Aboriginal culture. As Freire (2006a) argues, “The oppressed, having internalized the images of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to reject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility” (p. 47). Thus, Aboriginal FSW’s participation in overcoming the colonial image of Aboriginal identity coincided with becoming autonomous and self-determining. Solidarity with others in this collective engagement of mastery and control ultimately resulted in creating a foundation of strength and confidence.

In accordance with the dominant thinking in much of the leisure literature (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997), I originally interpreted the women’s participation in traditional ceremonies, such as Sweat Lodges, Pow Wows and Drum Circles, to be a part of their identity affirmation as Aboriginal peoples. I also believed that these leisure experiences contributed to the maintenance of an identity of something other than prisoner. However, after almost three years of participation with the women in these ceremonies and discussions with the women, I discovered that most women had never had an Aboriginal identity that they could be proud of. Consequently, the women’s participation appears to have contributed to the return to a culture and heritage that was forcibly and systematically banished. In turn, this participation evoked the development of confidence and pride among the women. The process facilitated the creation of a new Aboriginal identity, which deviated from the shame and embarrassment typically associated with being Aboriginal.

It is important to note that the historical and oppressed identity of Aboriginal continues to be a prominent force in the lives of Aboriginal peoples. In the past, if a person were to pursue more education, they would be perceived as abandoning their culture and accused of being an *Apple*. In other words, lazy, drunken, dirty, and uneducated remain

characteristics used to describe Aboriginals and adopted by Aboriginals. As Shannon revealed, *“Come as a teenager, I very much rebelled...running away, getting drunk... pregnancy. I wasn’t going to do that, but I did because those are the self-fulfilling prophecies”*. Wanda observed, *“[If] you got to university and you get a degree...then all of the sudden you become a successful Indian, or an Apple, which is red on the outside and white on the inside”*. Being called an Apple is derogatory for many Aboriginal peoples. It is considered a betrayal of being Aboriginal. As Delores’s experiences suggested, moving off the reserve was also considered an act of betrayal, *“It was difficult...like we had friends on the reserve, but then the whole dynamics changed because we were in-town Indians. We were considered Apple Indians”*. As Norma astutely remarked, *“If you make a good life you end up losing who you are”*. However, through the women’s participation in cultural traditions, the women were beginning the creation of a new Aboriginal identity. In the women’s process of transforming their collective identity, it became accepted that an Aboriginal person could have an education and remain Aboriginal. Aboriginal no longer had to be associated with characteristics such as lazy, drunken, dirty and uneducated.

The following are accounts of the women who worked with the female offenders in the facilitation of Aboriginal ceremonies and the impact of ceremony in their lives. The stories of women, such as Wanda, whose lives have been entrenched in ceremony for much longer than many of Aboriginal FSW who were experiencing these ceremonies for the first time, better articulate the importance of participating in such traditions. Equally though, all these women share the consequences of a history of colonialization and racism. As Wanda contended, *“My story mirrors most of the women”*, and Doris further remarked, *“if it wasn’t for the Sweats and the Talking Circles and all that, you know, the ceremonies, I wouldn’t be sitting here today.”* However, most of the women did not articulate the impact of ceremony on their healing to the same magnitude that Wanda and Doris did. This difference could be

explained by realizing healing is a process, where the women are at the beginning of their healing. Regardless of the women's stage of their healing journey, the impact of ceremony on who they are as Aboriginal women remained strong as they expressed a great desire to continue their participation in sweats and other ceremonies upon their release. "*I want to stay focused,*" explained Maria, "*I'm actually getting involved with my heritage...and that's one thing that I think I'm missing from my life, is getting into the Aboriginal ways which I never did before. So I'm just taking a good guess on thinking if I get into it, I wouldn't be getting into trouble*". In the same regard, Katie asserted, "*Getting into the spirituality will help me on my journey for the rest of my life, it will help guide me*".

In addition to the women's individual growth through their participation in cultural traditions, they found freedom as they came together in the participation and creation of ceremony. Nora described the importance of ceremony as "*a part of our [Aboriginal peoples'] growth...They help you understand yourself and others*". Again, this collective sense of growth and freedom is rooted in fact that women were able to experience their culture and a part of their history that was once deemed illegal and perceived as savage. "*They give me freedom and the heritage lost when I was a child*", explained Moira. During the development of the women's drum song, the women brainstormed how they were going to experience a sense of freedom. They came up with words such as *ceremony, strengthen, share, help, do, and sing*. By participating, and perhaps more importantly returning to their traditions, women were able to experience some sense of liberation from a position of alienation to a display of solidarity. For some, this sense of liberation facilitated an urge to reconnect with their roles as mothers and strong women. According to Joanne, part of her healing required her to "*accept being a woman and identifying all the strengths of being this woman and realizing the significance of bearing a child and having those skills*".

Through this collective process, the women were able to begin the process of creating a new Aboriginal identity founded in confidence and pride, as opposed to embarrassment and shame. As Shannon proclaimed, *“I want to tell everybody what a wonderful cultural thing it is...I’m learning that I can share...And people can see more the beauty of it”*. The development of a new Aboriginal identity provided a strong foundation for healing, growth and development. *“It’s inspired [my healing journey]”* continued Ruth, as she reflected on the impact of experiencing the cultural traditions in the prison, *“It’s given me hope. It’s given me the want to take the step, to know that I can do it. The confidence. The belief. The pride”*.

Coming Home – “Someday I’m coming home”

In the process of liberation, Aboriginal women were able to return to cultural traditions and practices that were forcibly and systematically banished. *“The Pow Wows gave me a community that I was like coming home”*, began Wanda, *“It was a place where I could be proud of who I was amongst a lot of Native people who were proud of who they were. She continued by making the statement:*

The sweats saved my life...I’ve always felt like this dual personality person...I was White when I was around the White people and I was Indian when I was with the Indian people...I became confident in who I am... if we had a doctor, a nurse, an inmate, a construction guy... it wouldn’t matter because we’re covered in mud when we’re done. We’d all have this different, but similar experience. You don’t bring your doctorate degree or you master’s degree into the sweat. You bring you into it.

This return to ceremony signified a sort of homecoming for the women and instilled a sense of pride and strength in being Aboriginal. While the women wanted to share their culture with others, they did not impose it. In this process, the women only sought recognition and respect. All CSC staff, inmates, and even volunteers from the community were invited to

Aboriginal Day and Pow Wow celebrations. Those who chose to go participated according to their own level of comfort. Some participants would sing and dance with the drummers, while others chose to sit and watch on the sidelines. Some participants chose to participate in the annual Aboriginal Day cake competition, while others came to admire the artwork and creativity of the competitors.

According to Freire (2006a), the struggle for liberation does not evolve into oppression of the oppressors. Rather, liberation of the oppressed involves the restoration of humanity in their oppressors, as well as themselves. He argues,

As a process of search, of knowledge, and thus creation, it requires the investigator to discover the interpenetration of problems, in the linking of meaningful themes. The investigation will be most educational when it is most critical, and most critical when it avoids the narrow outlines of partial or “focalized” views of reality, and sticks to the comprehension of *total* reality (p. 108).

The idea of avoiding narrow understandings of reality and embracing the comprehension of total reality echoes Young’s (1995) discussion regarding adopting a politics of difference in conceptualizations of an “ideal community”. Understanding the world in its totality leads to recognizing its incompleteness, and thus, the potential to become engaged in constant transformation (Freire). However, focalized and narrow views of the world reduce humanity to mindless spectators in a static view of consciousness. Narrow perceptions of the world are evident in Western conceptualizations of community, which are based on a desire for social wholeness and identification (Young).

This urge to unity seeks to think everything as a whole, or to describe some ontological region, such as social life, a system...The desire to bring things into unity generates a logic of hierarchical opposition. Any move to define an

identity, a closed totality, always depends on excluding some elements, separating the pure from the unpure (p.235).

However, as Young contends, adopting a politics of difference enables social relations to embody openness and bring different groups together without having to suppress the identity of another group in order to reach social unity. Notably, those women who used to live on the reserve did not want to return to their culture by returning to the reserve, which is a geographic location that was suggested by some participants as another form of oppression. As discussed earlier, many of the women have never lived on the reserve and did not express a desire to experience reserve life. Rather, upon their release, the women indicated that they wanted to go to urban centers. Ideally, these urban centers would emulate the *unoppressive city*. According to Young, the unoppressive city is defined as openness as opposed to unassimilated otherness. While the women did not describe such an environment, many did indicate that they wanted to continue walking the “Red Road” upon their release and thus live a way of life that will not necessarily conform to the dominant white society.

The Aboriginal FSW’s processes of liberation provided them the opportunity to return to their culture and traditions. This return came with an awareness of difference between themselves as Aboriginal women and the rest of society. By engaging in conscientização and liberation the women came to recognize and accept their rights and responsibilities as Aboriginal peoples. The attitudes of Aboriginal FSW resonate with a politics of difference since they do not wish to impose their culture and traditions upon others; they only want to regain strength and pride in who they are. According Young (1995),

A politics of difference lays down institutional and ideological means for recognizing and affirming differently identitying groups in two basic senses: giving political representation to group interests and celebrating the distinctive cultures and characteristics of different groups (p. 253).

As noted by Wanda in her discussion about the development of the Commissioner's Directive on Aboriginal Programming with CSC, Aboriginal peoples continue to struggle for distinct political representation. However, there have been greater strides towards the celebration of Aboriginal culture for Aboriginal FSW. This celebration has been predominantly achieved through engagement in traditional Aboriginal ceremonies. The women's experiences with traditional ceremony can be understood as participation in focal practices. As previously stated, focal practices are grounded in history and provide a centre of orientation (Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Borgmann, 1992). Ceremony as leisure and focal practices, and its impact on the women's transformation are further discussed in my final chapter.

The re-creation of Aboriginal identity fostered a return to the women's cultural roots. This process of returning home was facilitated by the Native Sisterhood in the prison. "*The Sisterhood is like a sub-group here*", explained Shannon, "*We're a group that we meet and drum and do crafts and we Sweat...we support each other*". As Maria stated, this support enabled women to collectively create a group to which they could belong and find strength:

I don't think I would have had the courage to pick up the drum or the courage to start singing or anything like this. It's really a lot to do with the Sisterhood, the people that are here.

Essentially, the ceremonies that were organized by the Sisterhood represented both a point of departure and return for the women. Ceremony was considered a point of transformation, where both action and reflection occurred. The women's reflections and action provided a vision of hope and the tools necessary to move towards that vision. As Ruth illustrated, "*My heart longs for the drum...When I sing, the energy that overcomes me is just totally fulfilling. I don't know how to explain it...I need that drum. That drum is a part of me*". In other words, drumming and singing, which are important components of ceremony, represented both a culture that was lost, and the energy to return to that culture.

In addition to the women's collective participation in traditional ceremony, the women also mentioned the importance of each other. According to Monique, "*The ladies who are involved here with the Sisterhood are a great help and support. I find the group is one of the biggest supports to each other here*". Some of the women, such as Joanne, were inspired by their peers, particularly in their strength as Aboriginal women:

The first time I met Shannon was the first time that I came here...She was really forthright and honest, straightforward...I see her as a really strong woman, a strong Native woman, you know. So, that just made me relate to her some more.

This return to their traditions and cultural re-birth developed into a *politics of difference* as women recognize that their needs are different from other women. As discussed earlier, some women preferred to seek guidance and counselling from Native Elders, as opposed to professionals. Many of the women emphasized the importance of the Elders' holistic perspectives. Ruth explained:

The people that come into CSC are certified...That's fine...but what they judge you on [is] what they learn in books and they don't look at the person, the situation or the history...But when you talk to an Elder, they have a special gift of experience, not from paper, but from life.

In the same regard, Deb contended,

[Elders are] not textbook geniuses, you know? They, they're in touch with the real world and they're more grounded. They cover everything...to having children, to death, to life, to working, to functioning in the world...It's a more holistic approach.

According to Terri, psychiatrists were not equipped to deal with the needs of Aboriginal FSW because of the difference in history:

The psychiatrists don't understand them. Until you've actually lost- you know, they lost their past, been through what they've been through, how can you say you know how they feel or know where they're coming from.

Wanda further described this politics of difference as she reflected on the difficulties she encountered during the development of the Commissioner's Directive on Aboriginal Programming:

We were struggling with them to accept the fact that one, our spirituality was lumped in with Chaplaincy, which is not what we wanted it to be because it's not a religion, it's a way of life, but that was the only way that [the] mainstream could understand who we are. They had to pigeon hole us...They want us to be able to fit the things they already have...They want us to fit into those theories.

Inherent in this politics of difference is an understanding that Aboriginal peoples are entitled to certain rights. Shannon contended, *"We're entitled to practice our cultural beliefs, whether it be medicines, ceremony, Elders, [and] Sundance"*. As Delores reflected on the impact of the Sweat Lodge, she stated:

It's just being part of that connection with each other and with the Creator and with Mother Earth and just that whole spiritual connection and just being a part of that impacts how they feel about themselves...Being a part of something that is their birthright.

Notably, this new identity did not involve returning to the reserve upon their release. *"I can't see myself trying to make a living on the reserve, because there's nothing there,"* explained Joanne, *"jobs are limited...it's just a little too isolated for me"*. For some, like Christine, their problems began on the reserve, *"I lived on the reserve for six years, you know*

Six Nations and I'm kind of tired of that...that's when I got into trouble". While reflecting on her past, Delores remarked:

When I moved to Toronto is when I got more exposure to the culture...the people that are on the reserve... they all went to residential schools and they were forced not to talk about their culture. They were forced not to speak their language.

As Wanda reflected about the reserve, she stated:

Why would you want to go back there? There's nothing there...If you asked me where I was to live, I wouldn't answer the Rez because my Rez is in the middle of nowhere and I wouldn't want to go back there to live. To visit, but not live.

Like Wanda, a few women such as Danielle spoke about visiting the reserve, recognizing their heritage, "*We were always visiting ...it's where my family is. It's where my blood is*".

The majority of women had never lived on the reserve. When asked to consider the reserve as a place to live upon their release, most women replied as Katie did, "*I've never been on one, so I can't really say much about that*". Norma explained stating, "*[Most] of our people in jail have not been raised on a reserve. They've been raised by foster parents, Children's Aid, [and] residential school*".

Given the systematic oppression of government policies such as residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the particularly harsh impact of the Indian Act on Aboriginal women, is logical that most Aboriginal women did not know the reserve and, even more importantly, have never met a Aboriginal woman role model. As previously stated, the Indian Act contributed to the loss of a generation through the creation of residential school, which effectively destroyed the mother-child relationship for generations to come (Faith, 2006).

When children were stolen from their families, mothers and grandmothers lost their ability to

teach and offer inspiration that would help guide these children as they entered adulthood. As Wanda's illustrated:

When I grew up, we weren't going to strive to be teachers, we didn't have a Native teacher, we didn't have a Native doctor, lawyer or anything. All we were going to be were waitresses or nuns, cuz that's what we saw in school...there was no role modeling.

However, some of the women were meeting inspirational Aboriginal women for the first time in prison. As Norma remarked, her interactions with the women offered them a sense of hope and pride in becoming well-educated Aboriginal women:

When they meet us, it's like... "Oh wow, there's really Indian people that do live good lives, working for a living and got an education". It's like role modeling. They see Indian people that didn't end up in the trap... We're creating pride in being women.

Most of the women, such as Meg affirmed Wanda and Norma's comments, "*Norma is a supporter for us. She's something that you look up to like a Native mother*". Ruth further explained, "*She gives me, positive direction, hope, inspiration, that security... females in particular, they need their mom, you know, that kind of nurturing.*" Women like Maria described Norma as a confidant and related to her as part of the family, "*I love Norma so much. I look at her as like, my grandmother...Somebody that I can confide in and talk to and about anything*". In the same regard, Nora succinctly stated, "*You need somebody of your own to be able to confide in*".

As illustrated by Katie, this sense of belonging in their culture has instilled a sense of responsibility to further explore who they are as Aboriginal peoples, "*Nobody in my family has actually done anything about it. I should learn about it. It's my background, you know...I would like to help the Native community, [be] there for my people*". For Maria, this involved

learning the language, *“Especially with the speaking language...I’m so dedicated to that”*. Many of the women expressed a desire to continue Aboriginal ceremonies upon their release. *“That’s going to be a part of my release plan”* declared Deb, *“I’m Ojibwa and I just find that it’s an easier way to transition...it’s smoother”*. Some, like Christine, will depend on family members, *“My uncle...an Ojibwa medicine man. He lives up in Thunder Bay and he wants me to go up there and do Sweat Lodges and stuff”*. Others, like Katie, will depend on Aboriginal Community Centres to continue with their growth and development as Aboriginal peoples, *“I would like to go to a Native Center...if I meet people in the Native centre, like people that have a straight head on them...I’ll have some friends.”* As discussed in the following pages, most of the women expressed a desire to continue down this *“Red Road”*.

In Reflection

CSC’s mission is to actively encourage and assist offenders in becoming law-abiding citizens (CSC, 2007). Corrections Canada recognizes that the majority of FSW are high need rather than high risk offenders (CSC, 1992). Consequently, they strive for each federal woman’s correctional facility to be program driven. Programming directives for FSW talk about the importance of a woman-centered, culturally sensitive and supportive environment for the development of women’s autonomy and self-esteem (Fortin, 2004). CSC currently offers three Aboriginal programs, The Circles of Change, The Family Life Improvement, and The Spirit of a Warrior. These programs target the women’s criminogenic, rehabilitative and spiritual needs, life skills and positive self-enhancement (Fortin, 2004).

Unfortunately, there is little to no component in the formal CSC programs that was related to colonization and oppression. When asked to comment on the Aboriginal programming provided by CSC the women and Aboriginal facilitators commented that

Aboriginal programming was “*White-washed*”. Joanne, one of the program’s participants, provided the following observations:

It’s just another WOSAP program...They make a dream catcher here and talk a little bit about Aboriginal stuff here. You know, they don’t get down to the history of the Aboriginal people. You know like when it started, like when the Europeans came over, they talk nothing about this. Like stuff that we should be educated on, that they should be educating us on.

In accordance with Joanne, Norma stated, “*It’s the same White man’s story only using Indian people and throwing in some beadwork*”. Furthermore, as Wanda argued, CSC “[*doesn’t*] have the component that they can heal from...you know, the colonization and the oppression of not knowing your culture and not being accepted by society, it’s even more emphasized within prison”.

As stated earlier, the women’s ability to find freedom was highly contingent on knowing their history (Friere, 2006a). This history includes personal experiences, as well as collective experiences as Aboriginal peoples. Unfortunately, as Joanne continued, most women did not know about Aboriginal cultures and traditions. “*Aboriginal people should be proud of themselves. There’s a lot of women that don’t know about their heritage, and they don’t know about their ceremonies, because there’s so much assimilation in our culture*”.

Women learned about their Aboriginal history through Norma, who would come and tell stories over the winter months. Winter, according to the Ojibwa tradition is the season of storytelling. Over the winter of 2007, during the Sisterhood meetings Norma came to talk about topics such as the traditional role of women, the impact of the residential schools and how they were focused on “*making the Native non-Native*” (Sisterhood minutes, March 5, 2007). According to Norma:

By learning their history, they know that they had a good history and the steps that it took to lose it. So, in learning that, the anger is gone, or hopefully it's diminished. With the anger gone, you can start to rebuild a good life...they realize where the anger came from in their parents. They realize that their parenting skills were lost and hopefully they lose part of the anger that they have towards their families when they weren't there for them.

In short, education of Aboriginal history and how it relates to the women's experiences of oppression and marginalization in their past and present were critical to their healing and pathway to liberation. Dialogue with others provided the opportunity for reflection and understanding.

In Action

The women's lives were filled with shame and embarrassment for being Aboriginal. As Shannon disclosed, *"I would never tell anybody about how I was Native. I remember this other time we were going to this party and we were all in a line trying to enter the house and... I couldn't go because I was Indian and that always sticks with me"*. However, by organizing their own ceremonies and advocating for certain rights through the Native Sisterhood, Aboriginal women were able to enter into a state of critical consciousness. Furthermore, engagement in ceremony and advocating for Aboriginal rights in prison provided the opportunity for the act of creation which, in addition to reflection, was required for change.

Those who worked intimately with Aboriginal FSW hoped that these women would eventually understand how their oppression has affected their lives and ultimately contribute to the re-writing of history by changing the status and perceptions of Aboriginal people. As Norma aspired:

*Hopefully one of our ladies will say, 'Hey, I heard a Grandmother once say-
and tell their children, who will also tell their children that this is the way it
used to be and this is the way it changed and this is the stuff that happened.*

The majority of the women did not explicitly state that societal change was the purpose of their actions. Understandably, most women were focused on their personal journeys of healing. Notably, there were a few women who were in positions of leadership and who had been in conflict with the law for the majority of their lives, such as Joanne and Shannon, who acknowledged the depth of their oppression and just how entrenched it is in their history. Nevertheless, the Native women did come together and create change within the prison. The women talked about three issues that they fought for. As told by Joanne, the first was a teepee:

*One time we got the president of the Aboriginal Women's Society of Canada,
and [the president of the Elizabeth Fry Society], and we had [someone] here
from [CSC] National Headquarters and we had called a round meeting with
the Sisterhood and...that's when we first got the approval for our Teepee.
Because, many years ago- I don't even know that story...I just know that one
time they had teepee poles here and one of the staff members...was ordered
to...cut them down because they were afraid that somebody was going to use
them to go over the fence.*

The second fight was for a Native Liaison. According to the Commissioner's Directive, federal correctional facilities are responsible for hiring "one or more liaison personnel to assist in providing leadership, teaching, cultural awareness, counselling and general service to Aboriginal offenders" (CSC, 1995, p. 6). During the Native Sisterhood's struggle to secure a Native Liaison, there was believed to be fifteen self-identified Aboriginal women in the prison. Shannon proclaimed, "*We collectively as a Native people need to step*

up and get somebody else and make them accountable...because they [CSC] are responsible to get somebody. We are entitled to have somebody...like a liaison". Eventually, the prison responded to their request and hired Terri as the Native Liaison.

Finally, the other debate was that women classified under maximum security (commonly referred to as "*max*") should be allowed to participate in ceremonies. Several women commented on participation in Native traditions as an inherent right. Ruth asserted, "*Aboriginal rights are being seriously, seriously violated in the max unit*". In the same regard, Doris argued, "*I believe the max should be out here at the Sweats, ceremonies, the ceremony, the shaking tent, the fast- this is our right. This is our way of life*". She further insisted, "*It's very important you know? If you are advocating on behalf of women in corrections, then that needs to be emphasized*". On August 15, 2007, two women from the maximum security unit were permitted to join the Sweat. The women were welcomed and all who participated in the ceremony hoped that their presence would ongoing (reflexive journal, August 15, 2007).

Travelling the *Red Road*

According to Freire (2006a), liberation must be constantly pursued. Upon a woman's release, she may be free from prison, but she will never be truly free without continuing her engagement in reflection and action. He stated that "the unfinished character of human being and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity...in order to *be*, it must *become*" (p. 84). Thus, Aboriginal FSW must be able to find opportunities for dialogue, reflection and action with others. As indicated in the data below, the majority of the women affirmed that they want to continue pursuing the Red Road upon their release. When women leave the prison, they lose the support of fellow Aboriginal FSW. While, they may remain in contact with the Native Elder and Liaison, they lose the consistency of their support. As suggested in the data, the Aboriginal resources and support

found in prison are hard to find in the larger community. Unfortunately, the effects of centuries of oppression continue to affect the general Aboriginal community. Aboriginal peoples continue to seek refuge from this oppression through alcohol and drug abuse, and even become oppressors of their own people. Without necessary resources and support for critical reflection and action, particularly from Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal FSW may fall into a path of hopelessness and despair.

Continued support for the exploration of what it means to be Aboriginal, and collective growth and development is central to the “successful integration” of Aboriginal FSW. This contention was recognized by those who worked with the women and the women themselves. Terri, the Native Liaison stated, *“the hope and the goal is that everything that they participate in here, wherever they’re going, they can carry on”*. According to Deb, *“the Native community, as long as that’s available...it’s up to me whether or not I’m gonna make it or break it”*. In other words, it is generally recognized by the women that they themselves will play a large role in the success of their release, however, Aboriginal resources and opportunities must be available.

Unfortunately, there is limited support for this pathway of growth and development in the Aboriginal community in urban centres. As Doris remarked, *“A lot of women probably fall out of that path because of the area that they’re released to...they won’t find that [supportive environment]”*. Maria who so adamantly wanted to learn her Native language noted, *“I just haven’t found the people that can teach me this...I’d have to go to the reserve”*. Similarly, Delores argued that the primary concern for Aboriginal women offenders returning to the community is the lack of support for healing in the traditional Aboriginal way:

I think that part of it contributes to the perpetual revolving door, the lack of support...Wanda and I do the traditional component and we see the progress that they’re making and then this light shines up inside of them...they’re

discovering who they are and what they want from their lives and what they want for their children...and when they get out, that whole traditional component is gone which I think is a backbone to their strength that keeps them going.

Wanda echoed Doris' sentiments stating that upon release women "need to go to a traditional community... that they would go someplace where there is a Sweat, where there is a trusting traditional person". Moreover, most women were unaware of the limited resources that existed. As Ruth expressed,

The only problem with me is that I don't have the access as to where they are. Like I know there's a place in Kitchener, but I don't know where. There's a place in Toronto for drumming and Pow Wows and stuff like that, but I don't know where.

Terri explained there are a few resources for support in the community, but access is difficult to navigate:

We try to hook them up with organizations in whatever area they're going so they can carry on, [but] a lot of the time, when [the women] walk out that door...all of the sudden they're all afraid, so they just don't know which way to go. In here, it's so structured and out there...it's so big.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, healthy and functional Aboriginal communities are hard to find (Monture-Agnes, 2000). Barriers, such as alcoholism and discrimination against offenders, prevent Aboriginal FSW from finding support in Aboriginal communities. Christine, who had been released for seven months, had planned on continuing her involvement with Aboriginal traditions by Sweating with her uncle who was a medicine man. Unfortunately, upon Christine's return to GVI for a breach of parole, she informed me that she was unable to Sweat with her uncle because he had gone back to drinking (reflexive

journal, August 15, 2007). Sweating under the influence of alcohol or drugs is considered disrespectful. Discrimination against incarcerated women is evident in the Native community. Wanda explained that this discrimination exists “*because a lot of our own people are still stuck in a place that these [incarcerated] people don’t deserve what’s rightfully inherited*”. As mentioned earlier, the majority of the women do not plan on going to the reserves. Consequently, most of the women will be dependent on Native Friendship Centres in urban cores. According to Norma, “*Friendship Centres are like small reserves in the city and they cater to people that they know...when you’ve been in jail and locked out, there is a stigma on your reputation in lots of places*”. In other words, the limited Aboriginal resources available for the women in urban centres are often discriminatory towards those who have been incarcerated.

As noted earlier, Sections 81 and 84 in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act currently allow for the transfer of custody and care of Aboriginal offenders into their own community (Department of Justice, 1992). These pieces of legislation enable possibilities for transfer of an offender into a facility specifically for Aboriginal offenders (Section 81) and parole into Aboriginal communities (Section 84) (Department of Justice). However, in 2000 the Aboriginal Issues Branch issued a report identifying the need for “effective community building for Section 81 and Section 84 agreements to be realized with various Aboriginal communities” (p.52). Very few women actually took advantage of these opportunities to be supported by the Aboriginal community. Only one woman, Joanne, mentioned the possibility of release under Section 84. When I remarked on the seemingly small amount of women taking advantage of these release plans, Norma and Terri responded:

Terri: I think it’s because there’s not enough knowledge of it.

Norma: ...there’s a component of it is that you have a community, a Native community that’s willing to take responsibility for you and a lot of these

women walked alone. They're not even aware of a Native community that would consider them and they feel so worthless that they've been in jail...

Felice: *I'm assuming they're told because I know that they're supposed to be told.*

Terri: *Yeah, when they come in they're supposed to be made aware of Section 81 and 84.*

Felice: *But there are no inquiries?*

Terri: *There are no inquiries.*

According to Norma, thus far only one woman in Ontario has taken advantage of this reintegration program.

With the lack of support and unwelcoming attitude of the community it is no surprise that women often return to their original pathway to crime. As Norma indicated, *"You're welcome in that society that lives down there. So, when you've met nothing but unfriendliness and cold behaviour, it's a nice feeling to meet somebody who smiles and says "Hey, come and join us!"*. And so, she continued, it's back to a life of poverty and crime, *"You drink and take drugs so you don't have to think about it. You sell it or move it around because you're making money off it"*.

Reflections on Healing and Hope

In accordance with Freirian concepts of liberation, the women's processes of healing and hope occurred through transformative experiences of reflection and action in prison. Critical awareness of Aboriginal FSW's marginalized and oppressed positions in society were the starting point for the emergence of empowerment and conscientização. The destruction of family, heritage and culture, and memories of shame and embarrassment associated with being Aboriginal were some of the painful experiences of oppression that created solidarity among Aboriginal FSW. In the oppressive and controlling environment of

prison, humanity was restored through a return to traditional ceremonies, support from other Aboriginal FSW in the Native Sisterhood, and relationships of mutual trust with Native Elders. Through these experiences the women were able to experience healing and participate in the re-creation of Aboriginal identity; ultimately an identity that they could be proud of. The women's distinctive culture and identity was celebrated through ceremony with others and ultimately promoted a politics of difference within the prison.

This engaging and interactive process of empowerment is closely related to Pedlar, Haworth, Hutchison, Taylor and Dunn's (1999) *social ecological theory of empowerment*. This theory differs from other conceptualizations of empowerment because of its focus on social contexts and the relationships that exist within these contexts. According to Pedlar et al., earlier research on empowerment suggested that empowerment occurs when a relationship of dominance occurs and individuals gain control over certain resources. However, the social ecological theory of empowerment suggests that "one person becoming empowered does not require that others become proportionally disempowered; in fact people's life experiences appear most empowering when there is an equitable distribution of power" (p. 101).

Freire (2006a) argues that true liberation involves the humanization of both the oppressed and the oppressor. All human beings ought to be engaged in meaningful dialogue so that they can achieve critical awareness of their incompleteness and discover their potential for transformation. Pedlar et al.'s (1999) idea of social balance through symbiotic relationships offers further understanding of this humanization. The following chapter furthers the discussion of such relationships and the synergy that exists. As Pedlar et al. state, "in situations where people [flourish], we noticed they treat each other differently. Authentic friendships were common... Dreams and plans were taken seriously" (p. 102). Specifically, the next chapter will deepen the understanding of the women's relationships and the larger

social context that contributed to and constrained Aboriginal FSW's empowerment.

Ceremony, which is conceptualized as leisure, will be explored as a context for healing, social justice, resistance and ultimately for improving quality of life.

Chapter Six: Deepening Understanding

The healing process for Aboriginal FSW involved healing at both a collective and individual level. The women's processes of healing occurred through engagement in cultural ceremonies and traditions, which lead to expressions of solidarity and experiences of resistance and transformation. Relationships, characterized by unconditional support, love, acceptance and mutual respect and reciprocity, were critical to the women's processes of healing. The following discussion on the women's experiences of healing are embedded in feminist and Aboriginal theories. Specifically, the importance of women's attachment to others, and experiences of collective engagement is understood as critical to their healing, growth and development. Pedlar et al.'s (1999) *social ecological theory of empowerment* is used to deepen the understanding of these experiences in terms of empowerment. Finally, I argue that the holistic perspective of Aboriginal peoples, which emphasizes harmony and revolves around balance, would be a positive force for change that could lead to an improvement in the quality of life for Aboriginal FSW, as well as others.

Collective healing was required because of the systemic control and oppression that has been experienced by Canada's first people for over 500 hundred years, which ultimately resulted in the general acceptance that Aboriginal peoples belong on the margins of society. Essentially, it has become accepted that Aboriginal peoples were to be subjects of domination. As explained by Spears (2006), "Within the framework of institutionalized racism and colonization, members of the dominant group are able to misuse their powers, which they have done in so many ways and for some many years, that it becomes normal for them" (p. 82). In significant ways, through government sanction, Canada produced cultural annihilation and assimilation of First Nation people. The Aboriginal FSW who were a part of this study consisted of two generations who virtually all felt as though they had lost a part of who they were. Some of the women experienced residential school, while others were the

children of parents who lived through the residential school era. Upon their incarceration, Aboriginal women were generally confused and ashamed of who they were. These women were not only ashamed of being a convicted offender, but also for being Aboriginal.

The personal lives of many Aboriginal women, which could be considered an outcome of the collective experience of oppression and control, required healing because of their individual histories of domination and trauma. As previously stated, 90% of Aboriginal female offenders have been physically abused and 61% sexually abused (TFFSW, 1990). Though not overtly discussed by all of the women, it can be assumed that most women also perceived themselves as objects for sexual exploitation because of their extensive histories of sexual abuse. As expressed by Spears (2006), an Aboriginal adoptee, “I grew up within an ideology that said I did not exist, because Native people did not exist, except as mascots or objects of desire” (p. 83). Furthermore, 87% of Aboriginal FSW are reported to have needs related to substance abuse (Dell & Boe, 2000), the average income of Aboriginal families is about half the national average (Menzies, 1999), and Aboriginals rate lower than the general Canadian population on all educational attainment indicators (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2005). Thus, Aboriginal women had to fight against associating themselves with labels of lazy, under-educated, poor, drunk, and drug addicts with bodies meant for sexual exploitation. They also had to learn to heal from the wounds of their past. As Joanne stated, *“I have to understand...I was a kid, I couldn’t defend myself against certain abuses”*. Healing individually and collectively occurred simultaneously and interdependently. That is, one did not precede the other, nor could one occur without the other.

While it can be argued that prison is an extension of colonization forces of the past, prison also served as a space for healing. Notably, most of the healing occurred within contexts that evaded the panoptical gaze of control and surveillance of the correctional system. In other words, when asked about the impact of correctional programs specifically

designed for Aboriginal women, they were described as White-washed and ultimately perpetuating the dominant ideology. The women emphasized the importance of ceremony and their relationship with the other Aboriginal women as important elements in their healing journey, as individuals and as a collective entity.

Leisure as Healing

Ceremony in this study was conceptualized as leisure, which, in turn, is understood as an individual experience that was freely chosen and intrinsically motivated (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). All FSW who participated in these ceremonies did so at their own desire. The respect and openness displayed were genuine. While primary workers and other CSC employees were present at Pow Wows and Aboriginal Day celebrations, they were rarely present at the Sweat Lodges and Sisterhood meetings. Leisure is also conceptualized as an occasion for collective power and is considered for its role in resisting the dominant structures of power and control (Shaw, 2001). Given that only fifty years ago spiritual gatherings of Native people were illegal, the collective gathering of Aboriginals through participation in ceremony in present day is a strong statement. The magnitude of these gatherings was made even clearer when Wanda informed me during our interview that *“in 1957 we wouldn't be having this conversation, it would be illegal”*. Ceremony for Aboriginal people represents a display of solidarity and collective strength in the wake of a path of alienation and destruction. The following sections discuss leisure as a context for personal healing, collective solidarity, resistance and transformation.

Personal Healing

Leisure may be considered a context conducive for personal healing because of its inherent quality of being a freely chosen experience and intrinsically motivated. It can be argued that such experiences are limited for marginalized and oppressed groups due to the

lack of resources (i.e., economic, social, etc.) and racism (Allison, 2000; Glover, 2007). In response to the lack of opportunity, marginalized groups will sometimes create their own opportunities for leisure, such as the *First String* baseball league created for African American youth by a group of African Americans in Illinois, United States (Glover & Bates, 2006). While leisure experiences for the women occurred within the controlled environment of prison, much like the *First String* baseball league, perhaps the most important element that enabled the women to experience leisure through their ceremonies is that they were organized by the women themselves. Consequently, the processes and outcomes did not coincide with traditional prison protocol. Social control through surveillance, discipline and punishment were replaced with safety and love. This sense of security provided an environment for the women to reveal their vulnerabilities. According to Freire (2006a), re-creation cannot occur without humility. Furthermore, as Wanda explained, in the Sweat, social hierarchies such as social status and race are irrelevant because “we’re [all] covered in mud when we’re done”. Thus, rather than reinforce social hierarchies, ceremony suspends divisions of class, race, and offender, and places emphasis on the humanity of all those involved. In a Sweat, participants strive towards the goal of healing themselves as well as everyone else. In accordance with Morris (2000), “a part of any good healing process is to help each see the other as a whole human being” (p. 116).

Clearly, the women do not necessarily forget that they are in a federal correctional facility or the division between offender and non-offender. However, ceremony in the prison, for some, could be considered a space where the women find freedom in simply being—without judgment or fear of being reported. This concept of space is similar to Wearing’s (1998) considerations of leisure as a personal space which could be a physical space, an emotional space, or a supportive space which allows participants to become who they want to be in their own right. This idea of *being* is closely related to Renwick and Brown’s (1996)

discussion of quality of life. According to Renwick and Brown, being encompasses the initiation of healthy behaviour, self-confidence, self-control, and coping with anxiety. Temporary relief from the panoptical eye of the prison provided the women with a sense of freedom to be and to behave in a manner that they chose. The women's behaviour could have been either destructive or constructive. However, during ceremony the women generally chose to display an ethic of care, respect, and honesty. The release of anger and pain in the Sweat Lodge, as opposed to resorting to violence towards others or self-mutilation, was an effective way of healing and coping. As Joanne stated, "[the Sweat Lodge,] *that's where I started dealing with the root of it all*".

The process of healing was also found in the development and maintenance of meaningful relationships. Through exchanges of conversation with other Native women, Aboriginal FSW found support and inspiration. The importance of dialogue can be understood in Green's (1998) analysis of women's talk as a powerful instrument in the process of (re)constructing personal identities. According to Green, the company of other women has the potential to lead to the empowering aspects of a shared leisure experience which serve to unmask enduring stereotypes. Trust, reciprocity, and strength were qualities that many of the women used to describe the meaningful relationships developed with other Aboriginal women in the prison— many of which were developed through ceremony. Meaningful relationships were integral in some of the women's processes of personal growth and self-restoration. According to Gilligan (1982):

Because women's sense of integrity appears to be entwined with an ethic of care, so that to see themselves as women is to see themselves in a relationship of connection, the major transitions in women's lives would seem to involve changes in the understanding and activities of care (p. 171).

This understanding of care involves caring for others and also receiving care from others, for it is the ongoing process of attachment that is used to measure women's development (Gilligan). The following comment by Maria depicted the importance she placed on what she learned from her "sister":

Doris told me I have the opportunity to learn all [these traditions]. And she would literally put us in the gazebo and tell us, "you're not leaving until you get the song right". You know? And she really did me a really good favour because that's something that I will never forget, right? Now I know how to drum, now I know how to chant.

Native Elders were particularly important for many of the Aboriginal FSW in their healing journey. The relationship most of the women had with Norma was different from the relationship they had with other CSC employees. The women's relationship with Norma was based upon trust and love. Furthermore, it developed symbiotically. That is, Elders and women participated as both audience and performer, thereby contributing to the growth and development of each other. This kind of engagement had the potential to provide the foundation for the development of a meaningful relationship based upon shared meanings and shared practices of healing. As previously mentioned, such experience can be understood as focal practices, which enable individuals to move beyond self-interest to areas of shared meaning (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). Most of the relationships the women had with other CSC personnel were perceived as meaningless in terms of their healing. These relationships were considered professional and based upon textbooks and other clinically-based knowledge, which essentially reinforced colonizing relationships of the past. In contrast, Native Elders and spiritual leaders are considered a part of the healing circle. As Baskin (2006) describes:

In the circle, women learned that they were not alone and that their situation and feelings were similar to other women's. They learned how to trust, take

risks and both give and receive support, thereby building relationships and a community of empowered women, which can only be achieved by coming together in a circle; these cannot be achieved through individual counselling or therapy (p. 221).

Notably, the role of the Elder was to listen and be an inspiration, as opposed to declaring how things should be done. As Deb commented, the Native Elder “*was always there to listen and she was always there to, to not do it for me but to, give me direction*”. The women’s relationships with Elders were much more informal as they did not consist of the structure of oppression and control put forth by the correctional system. As indicated by several of the women, and the Native Elder herself, the Elder was highly valued for her ability to listen without judgment and without consequence. However, as indicated by Norma, recent changes in CSC policy required assessments of the women from the Native Elder and Liaison. Such policies may hinder the very essence of the Elder-inmate relationship that appeared to contribute to the women’s healing

Collective Healing

In terms of collective healing, leisure was used by the women as a venue for the development and maintenance of solidarity and liberation. As the women indicated in their drum song, “*We’ll keep our spirits free*”, the women kept their spirits free by collectively participating in ceremony and song, which represented strength and action against the oppressive forces that controlled and continued to control their way of life. As Amadahy (2006) states, “music, drumming and voice are powerful medicinal tools” (p. 148). The women’s participation could be understood as an act of freedom— freedom to return to a tradition and heritage that was once lost. This process of liberation enabled the women to heal from their wounds of oppression that go back to when the Europeans first arrived.

Furthermore, the women were also exposed to Aboriginal culture and history, which facilitated an increasing awareness of their marginalized position in society and systemic structures of oppression that placed them there. Through conversation and dialogue with others, the women began to understand that their parents did not show them love and affection due to the impact of the way they were treated in residential schools. Throughout this study the detrimental impact of residential school on Aboriginal nations was paramount. As Haig-Brown (1998) argues, “without parental love and without parental role models students were not adequately equipped to fit into mainstream society” (p. 21).

In addition to being stripped of any emotional relationship, the children who went to residential school were essentially made to believe that education for Native people was of little importance. The Canadian government attempted to “civilize” Aboriginal children by teaching them the skills of gardening, farming, sewing, cooking, and cleaning. According to Haig-Brown (1998), “the governments and the missionaries had decided that Native people should be farmers or farmer’s wives, not scholars” (p. 66). At some schools, like the Kamloops Indian Residential School until the late 1940’s, no child attended school for more than two hours a day, compared to the five hours of education a day students received at the local public school (Furniss, 1995). Currently, federal institutions are required to encourage women offenders to complete a grade 10 level of education (Fortin, 2004). In addition to finding further opportunities for school, the women also were able to find a role model in their relationship with the Native Elder— an Aboriginal woman who had acquired training as a health care aid, obtained a diploma in public relations and an honours Bachelor of Arts with a major in Native Studies and minor in Law and Justice. Thus, during their time spent in GVI, the women also began to realize that Aboriginal peoples could be educated without becoming an *Apple* (red on the outside and white on the inside) and ultimately maintain an Aboriginal identity. This knowledge gave the women the ability to fight against oppressive systems and

resist powers of control and experience the freedom to re-create the meaning of being Aboriginal.

Collective experiences of healing may be particularly important in the healing process for Aboriginal women because of their gender and because of their culture. The fusion of women's identity and intimacy was not unlike that described by Gilligan (1982) as she noted in her study that women depict their identity through relationship. Similar to Green's study, the Aboriginal FSW described themselves in terms of relationship when asked the question "*Who are you at GVI?*". Cassandra replied, "*I am a mother, a daughter and a sister*".

Furthermore, as stated by Baskin (2006):

Aboriginal peoples believed that all life was interconnected, and one of their central values was conformity to the group and harmony within it. Thus, the individual was connected to the family which was connected to the community which was connected to the Nation (p. 218).

It was evident from the exchanges witnessed in this study that interdependency and interconnectivity are critical to Aboriginal women's strength, growth and development. In other words Aboriginal's women quality of life is highly dependent of their sense of belonging and connection with others.

Another component of Renwick and Brown's (1996) conceptualization of quality of life is *belonging*. Belonging refers to the connections individuals have with their community. Labels of deviant, offender and Aboriginal have reinforced the position of these women on the margins of society. Furthermore, institutions of colonization, such as residential schools and prison, effectively maintained the marginalized and oppressed status of Aboriginals. However, upon further exploration of their history and participation in ceremonies, the Aboriginal FSW began to realize that it was not inherent in their being to be on the margins. Music through drumming, singing and dancing were central components to the women's

ceremonies in prison. Aboriginal music, according to Amadahy (2006) has a function. She contends that through music, participants collaborate, coordinate, and cooperate— in essence, for that moment in time the women belonged to the process of making music. Amadahy further argues that:

Making music, drumming and dancing were ceremonies in and of themselves— spiritual acts that connected the “artist” to her own spirit, community, her ancestors, all her relations and certainly the Creator (Amadahy, p. 144).

With the possibility for this connection and the realization that, as Aboriginal women, they could belong somewhere other than the margins of society, the women found hope as they began to engage themselves in processes of *becoming*.

In addition, to being and belonging, the final component in Renwick and Brown’s (1996) conceptual framework of quality of life is becoming. They contend that becoming consists of participating in activities that provide relaxation and stress reduction, and activities that promote self-development through the acquisition of skills and knowledge (Renwick & Brown). Becoming can also be understood as recognizing the potential for transformation (Freire, 2006a). According to Freire (2006a), understanding history as unfinished brings forth notions of responsibility and autonomy. Furthermore, women could focus on their strengths and their potential. As they began to understand their history of oppression, they could find freedom *from the structures of society* and freedom *to become*. Humanity requires the creation and re-creation of meaning of history and culture. Freire (2006a; 2006b) argues, to exist in society is to create how and why we want to live, and to commit to this way of life. This commitment involves constant re-creation and transformation. Thus, in the women’s experiences of becoming, leisure became a context where the women could find the freedom to re-create.

Leisure as Resistance

The women's experiences of transformative healing were made possible by resisting the characteristic of delinquent imposed upon them by their experience of incarceration. Such resistance was made possible through the women's engagement in cultural ceremonies. The focus on humanity in the ceremonies assisted the women in resisting the structures of oppression and control. As Deb stated, without ceremony, "*it only leaves the structured CSC*". In other words, without ceremony the women experiences in prison would have consisted only of experiences determined by the prison, which is described by Foucault (1995) as a mechanism of power that reinforces hierarchies of power and control. As previously mentioned, Foucault argues that prisons produce delinquents and distinguish these delinquents from an elite group of people who use incarceration as a form of justice to serve themselves. The women's internalizations of delinquent were made evident in focus group when they were asked to discuss what they felt the perceptions of the prison authorities were of themselves. A few women at the beginning of the focus group articulated labels of convict, violent criminal, and drug addict. However, as the discussion continued, members of the Circle began to declare that did not care what the authorities thought of them. As Penny asserted, "*I don't really care what they think, but their perception is wrong*". Resisting the perceptions of the powerful permitted the women to move beyond the structures of control and move towards the potential for transformation. Near the end of the discussion, women such as Dora declared, "*I want to be an ex prisoner in my mind and body*".

This process of healing through resistance and re-creation provided the women with a *pedagogy of hope* for their future. According to Freire (2006b), inaction results in hopelessness and despair and "just to hope is to hope in vain" (p. 2). He further explains that "a change in understanding, which is of basic importance, does not of itself...mean a change in the concrete" (p. 19). Thus, hope requires both critical awareness and action. More

specifically, hope requires struggle for change. Freire describes his personal journey of hope as being written in *rage and love*, in which he experienced with courage to love and to be angry. Similarly, the women's journey of hope was embedded in anger, as they acknowledged their pain of oppression, and love, as they were inspired and loved. The Sweat Lodge provided women with an opportunity to engage in action. The physical pain in Sweat facilitated the release of emotional pain and ultimately relief. Talking Circles provided a context for increased awareness through dialectical understanding. Transformation is an ongoing struggle requiring more than one occasion (Morris, 2000). Thus, Aboriginal ceremony, in its tradition of recurrence and continuity provided a stable, secure environment for change. In the prison, the women's collective endeavours succeeded in achieving the beginnings of structural change by securing a Native Liaison, raising a teepee, and having women classified under maximum security participate in a Sweat. Through the women's involvement in these changes, they formed a pedagogy of hope which empowered them to find that potential and freedom to travel the *Red Road*.

The women's experiences of resistance can be understood through an interactionist perspective, which focuses on the subjective experiences of leisure and connects them to "women's experiences of oppression or constraint arising out of their relationship to societal power relations and ideological factors" (Shaw, 2001, p. 191). In this study, cultural ceremonies are the contexts for leisure. In accordance with intersectionality theory (Brotman & Kraniou, 1999; Mann & Huffman, 2005), women's experiences of oppression differ due to factors such as age, race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, which can occur simultaneously. Some forms of oppression may be more dominant than others, depending on the situation. In the experiences of the Aboriginal FSW, two persistent forms of oppression that the women deliberately resisted were dominant ideologies related to colonial perceptions

of Aboriginal peoples, and crime and punishment. In the same way that forms of oppression can occur simultaneously, various forms of resistance can also occur at the same time.

The women were able to engage in the re-enforcement of Aboriginal traditions in the smoking of tobacco inside the Sweats. Passing tobacco is used in ceremonies to connect with spirits. While, the Commissioner's Directive on Aboriginal Programming explicitly recognizes that Aboriginal offenders have the right to access traditional medicines and practice cultural traditions (CSC, 1995), the women nonetheless felt that they were resisting the regulations of CSC and living out Aboriginal tradition. As I noted in my reflexive journal, "the women celebrated that they were smoking tobacco inside institutional property" (March 12, 2007). Again, Aboriginal FSW's engagement in Aboriginal traditions provided opportunities for resistance. At the same time, behaviour which could have been perceived as deviant became constructive as the women effectively returned to their cultural traditions by exerting some self-determination in their process of liberation, while simultaneously resisting the creation of docile bodies and mindless cogs.

According to Shaw (2001), "resistance is not necessarily an act of conscious deliberation or intent" (p. 196). An underlying force of oppression that was neither necessarily recognized nor explicitly resisted by the women was the oppressive force of a patriarchal society. The women's collective experiences of resistance demonstrated strength and power through supportive and loving relationships, which ultimately resisted patriarchal conceptions of the voiceless and powerless woman. As indicated by Cassandra, "*the Native sisters brings [sic] strength and it's helped me in healing— the healing and the shift in my perception*".

In *She No Speaks* Martin-Hill (2006) states:

The stereotype of She No Speaks is a construction born from the tapestry of our colonial landscape...She is the woman who never questions male

authority. She never reveals her experiences of being abused by the man who is up there on that stage, telling the world about the sacredness of women and land...She No Speaks serves him coffee. She is the woman who knows about sexual abuse, since it has happened to her from her earliest memories. She is quiet, she prays, she obeys, she raises the children, she stays home, she never questions or challenges domination— she is subservient (p. 108).

For a few of the women, notions of the weak and subservient woman was purposely resisted in their processes of liberation. Joanne indicated that she wanted to “*accept being a woman and identifying all the strengths of being this woman and realizing the significance of bearing a child*”. However, for most Aboriginal FSW, collective acts of resistance and support were not motivated by any particular desire to challenge patriarchal conceptions of the silent and powerless woman. Nonetheless, the women’s collective acts of resistance and support effectively challenged the patriarchal concept of Aboriginal women and celebrated the power and strength of what Martin-Hill (2006) calls the *Sacred Woman*.

In pre-colonial time, Martin-Hill (2006) argues that Aboriginal women were regarded as Sacred Women. She says that:

Sacred Woman’s ability to love and be loved is her power...we are not servants but teachers...Through our *collective* efforts...we must construct a traditional woman to lead us through the project of true intellectual, spiritual, and emotional decolonization” (emphasis added, p. 118).

In the same regard, Allen (2001), contends that prior to colonization, Indian women valued their role as vitalizers. “Through their own bodies they could bring vital beings into the world — a miraculous power whose potency does not diminish...they were mothers...empowered by their certain knowledge that the power could make life and that no other power could gainsay it” (p. 502-503). Through collective experiences of ceremony, Aboriginal FSW were

acknowledging their powers as Aboriginal women by embracing and celebrating their role as nurturers, teachers, and caregivers. When asked ‘*Who do you want to be when you grow up?*’, Melissa replied, “*I want to be the mother that I was in the past when I get out of here.*”. As discussed in the following section, relationships of unconditional support, love, acceptance, commitment and faith were critical in the women’s ability to resist varying forces of oppression, which ultimately facilitated their processes of healing.

Aboriginal women are the backbone of their communities (Amadahy, 2006; Martin-Hill, 2006). Notably, Aboriginal advocates for the re-establishment of the Sacred Woman are not advocating for a matriarchal society or establishing a set of roles for males and females. Rather, they are fighting for gender balance and harmony. Amadahy emphasizes the fluid and interchangeable tasks that men and women performed in pre-colonial societies. In the same regard, Martin-Hill notes that in the Haudenodaunee Nation, the mother’s brothers also took part in raising her children. In short, it is argued that Aboriginal peoples should be striving to create balanced interdependency between men and women that is inspired by mutual trust and respect.

Social Ecological Theory of Empowerment

The emphasis by many of the women on inspirational, reciprocal relationships, which in essence provided a safe and open environment for expressions of healing, solidarity and resistance, can be further understood through Pedlar et al.’s (1999) *social ecological theory of empowerment*. This theory conceptualizes the social context of a person’s life as an ecosystem. Pedlar et al. state:

Analogous to the balance and symbiosis found in natural ecosystems, the process and outcome of empowerment are *mutually reinforcing* among the people who interact with one another in that social context. This means that empowerment is much more dependent upon a balance of power among the

interacting individuals than is suggested by conceptualizations which portray empowerment as resting on domination (original emphasis, p. 102).

Pedlar et al. describe when a person experiences a richly *textured life*, they are in relations of community where knowledge, aspirations, social commitment and openness exist. This description of a textured life contrasts deeply with Foucault's (1995) depiction of prisoners as mindless cogs in a machine that can be conditioned to act in accordance with a prescribed and predictable behaviour. It is important to reiterate that the women's experiences of empowerment occurred in the absence of surveillance and the threat of punishment.

Knowledge, aspirations, social commitment and openness are four conditions that help to further explicate the women's experiences of healing and re-creation of their identity. In the following paragraphs, these conditions are discussed in regards to the women's experiences of empowerment in the social context of Aboriginal cultures and traditions.

According to Freire (2006a), action is as important as reflection in the process of liberation. That is, the ability to act upon one's knowledge is as important as the knowledge itself (Pedlar et al., 1999). Accordingly, she and her colleagues conclude that "knowledge of how human service systems and policies are devised and operationalized is a significant factor in the kind of support a person ultimately receives. Policies are often complex and difficult to navigate" (Pedlar et al., p. 104). For most Aboriginal FSW, there has been limited access to both formal and informal education and they have therefore had little opportunity to participate in the production of knowledge (Blaney, 2006). As with the conditions that explain the social ecological theory of empowerment, the social context in ceremonies, for instance, provided for relations of community. Within community, the women gained knowledge, developed aspirations of hope for a future, and experienced social commitment and openness from others in ceremonies. The result was empowerment-in-community, which was mutually reinforcing across members and which had the potential to reach out to others

beyond its members, thereby encouraging a furthering of openness. The way in which the “rules” of imprisonment shifted through the efforts of the Sisterhood who joined in action with others, most vividly illustrate empowerment-in-community.

The women’s connections with organizations and individuals in the community, such as the Aboriginal Women’s Society of Canada, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Canada, and myself, enabled the women to advocate for a Native Liaison and gain support from CSC for the erection of a teepee on the spiritual grounds at GVI. While the women knew they had certain rights as Aboriginals in the Correctional system, they required the support of others to help them navigate these policies and to advocate for these rights. The women’s participation in these changes provided opportunities for them to take part in the re-writing of history and the advancement of knowledge regarding Aboriginal rights, ceremonies and traditions. As noted earlier, the erection of the teepee, along with advocating for and receiving institutional support for the women in maximum security to participate in the Sweat Lodge, and acquiring a Native Liaison are concrete examples of how the women enacted structural change in their community at GVI. This was made possible through the changes in federal corrections for women, which were founded in the principles of *Creating Choices*. Considering again Foucault’s analysis of prison as a social context for the exertion of power and the ultimate challenge to change that structure, the inclusion of Aboriginal justice may be one mechanism where change can occur within Canada’s justice system. Aboriginal conceptualizations of justice are further discussed towards the latter part of this chapter.

The women’s experiences of empowerment in prison may spread and bring about change in the social structures of the broader community. This potential of empowerment for change in society is fuelled by the women’s opportunities for hope. The conditions of empowerment provide opportunities for hope— people are able to visualize a bright future and have a desire to experience these possibilities (Pedlar et al., 1999). Confidence, growth and

overcoming obstacles are characteristic of those who live with aspirations for the future. in praxis, for the women, hope was arguably obtained through their ability to create change within the prison structure. As Freire contends, hope is attained through action. Moreover, aspirations are also often supported and encouraged by others (Pedlar et al.). Indeed, the women indicated that hope for their future was also inspired through others. Aboriginal FSW's collective engagement in Aboriginal traditions with others gave them pride, inspiration, hope and confidence in following their path of healing.

Most importantly, the women's relationship with others, particularly with the Native Elder, provided unconditional support and love. The high degree of acceptance, commitment and faith in the women's capacities demonstrated by Norma, Wanda and Delores were critical to the women's healing and ability to find strength to pursue their healing journey. According to Pedlar et al. (1999), social commitment is characterized by unconditional support and acceptance. Norma was a paid CSC employee, but her commitment to the women far exceeded her "paid" employment. She was consistently open to and gave time for the women. Furthermore, Wanda and Delores were volunteers from out of town who commuted over two hours every time they went to the prison to facilitate a Sweat. Equally important to the demonstration of unconditional support and acceptance is the presence of mutuality and respect. The kind of relationship was evident in the process of the Sweat, where there was a temporary suspension of divisions such as non-offender and offender. Those individuals involved in the Sweats produced energies of support which contributed to the common goal of healing. A high degree of respect was demonstrated by all participants. The women respected Wanda and Delores for their wisdom, commitment, love and support. Wanda and Delores respected the women for their ability to find strength in the oppressive environment of prison, and for their expressions of kindness. Wanda commented:

One of the things that always blows our minds is that [the women] live on a budget which is way less than what we could even imagine...part of the Sweat is that they put a feast together and you know, we don't have to do it, but they do it amongst themselves, everybody brings their food, which is great- and it's a great sacrifice.

In short, as she later posited, “*when you treat people like human people, like the human that you are, you are going to get better results*”.

A related aspect of the *social ecological theory of empowerment* is openness. Pedlar et al. (1999), state that openness of the community is most important because the other three components— knowledge, aspiration, and social commitment, serve to make such opportunities and ultimately empowerment-in-community possible. They argue:

The knowledge that really counts is knowledge concerning these opportunities. The aspirations that really count are aspirations to take on the challenges such opportunities present. The social commitment that really counts envisages the person to whom one is committed finding...a life that gives substance to the ideal of empowerment-in-community (p. 112).

By virtue of the traditional system of imprisonment, for FSW, the potential for empowerment-in-community was limited to those within the closed prison system. Elements of the community had to be brought into the prison for the women through Native Elders and volunteers in the context of leisure, specifically through traditional Aboriginal ceremony. While experiences of residential school and other decrees legislated by the Indian Act on Aboriginals effectively eradicated entire cultural competencies (CPVAW, 1993; Faith, 2006; Furniss, 1995; Haig-Brown, 1998), Aboriginal FSW experiences of cultural ceremonies in prison enabled them to engage in the exploration of their heritage and partake in the re-creation of Aboriginal identity. This re-creation effectively contributed to their healing as

they learned about their history, found inspiration, and gained confidence through the support of others. However, empowerment for the FSW occurred in prison, and meant they were still on the margins of society.

Persistent Structures of Oppression

The women's empowering experiences will need to continue upon their release. Many of the women indicated that support from the Aboriginal community is crucial to their ability to continue down a path of healing and self-creation as Aboriginal women, but as previously indicated, there are few opportunities for empowerment in the larger community. Individuals in the community who are committed to the development of Aboriginal traditions and cultures have remarked on the absence of supports and resources for traditional Aboriginal healing in both reserve and urban communities. As Delores stated, "*that whole traditional component is gone [upon the women's release], which I think is a backbone to their strength that keeps them going*". Spears (2006) reaffirms the lack of Aboriginal culture in Canadian society stating, "the possibility of finding accurate information about Native culture...is beyond the reach of the average Canadian because this information is suppressed within dominant communication systems" (p. 82). Aboriginal traditions on many reserves have been denigrated into virtual non-existence. Moreover, basic needs such as housing may be provided on the reserves, but employment and other meaningful activities are limited. While urban life may offer more opportunities for employment, there continues to be a lack of support for Aboriginal female offenders in their healing, discovery and re-creation of Aboriginal identity.

In addition to healing from the wounds of their past, Aboriginal women continue to face an ongoing colonialist system that affects all Aboriginal peoples. Monture (1989) argues that there are always winners and losers in a society where punishment prevails and force and coercion are validated. She further contends that in the case of First Nation citizens, as the

dispossessed people of the land, they will continue to be the losers. The over-representation of Aboriginal peoples in Canada's penitentiaries is an indication of the challenges that Aboriginal communities continue face. While Aboriginal peoples represent 2.8% of the Canadian population, they represent 18% of the federally incarcerated population¹⁴ (CSC, 2008). That is, the ratio of Aboriginal peoples in federal prisons was almost seven times more than in the Canadian population. According to researchers such as Dickson-Gilmour and La Prairie (2005, p. 29) and Proulx (2003), this over-representation is most likely explained by the structural inequities, biases and processes of the law. As well, the risks implicit in a life lived on the margins due, in part, to the colonial system of oppression have and continue to devastate Aboriginal communities.

Processes of the law that contribute to challenges Aboriginal peoples face include the discriminatory and racist behaviours and attitudes of some involved in law enforcement, as was documented in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matter Related to the Death of Neil Stonechild (Wright, 2004). Biased processes can be understood as sentencing policies that systemically marginalize Aboriginal peoples. Nuffield (1997 in Dickson-Gilmore & La Prairie, 2005) reveals how the guidelines to a mediation program in Saskatchewan excluded the types of offences most often committed by Aboriginal offenders. While the guidelines were not intended to prevent Aboriginal offenders from accessing this program, there was a built-in bias that had a discriminatory impact on Aboriginal offenders. Another example is Canada's child welfare law, which Monture (1989) describes as a racist system that "reinforces the status quo by applying standards and tests which are not culturally relevant" (p. 12).

Ongoing experiences of colonization, such as the discrimination, the lack of knowledge regarding Aboriginal cultures, and limited opportunity to participate in traditional ceremonies

¹⁴ According to Statistics Canada (2008), in 2006, the percentage of Aboriginal peoples in Canada increased to

for healing and other aspects of Aboriginal life will continue to affect the healing of Aboriginal female offenders.

Furthermore, an open community that is willing to support Aboriginal female offenders and open to their capacities as contributing members of society is difficult to find. In addition to the lack of cultural resources and supports, Aboriginal women are faced with gender discrimination within their own community. Blaney (2006) contends that the systemic structures of oppression that ensures the privileged male status in mainstream Canadian society are mirrored in Aboriginal communities. Consequences of this discrimination are evident in the disparity between the income of Aboriginal women, non-Aboriginal women, and Aboriginal men. According to the Statistics Canada (2006), “The median income of Aboriginal women was \$12,300, about \$5,000 less than the figure for non-Aboriginal women who had a median income of about \$17,300...The median income of Aboriginal women was also about \$3,000 less than that of Aboriginal men whom the figure was \$15,500” (p. 199). As Spears (2006) articulates:

It is important to consider why so many Aboriginal women found themselves in urban settings...A number of Aboriginal women were victimized by the violence in their communities and were therefore forced to leave. Some had to leave when they married out and found themselves disenfranchised of their Indian status and band membership. Others left because they were not able to live with the very aggressive application of band policies that marginalized them as women in their communities, for example, in housing. There were also women who moved to urban centres so their children could be educated (p. 72).

3.8%. The 2.8% mentioned above is from 1996. Data from 1996 are cited as more recent data regarding Aboriginal peoples who are federally sentenced has not yet been released on CSC’s website.

As previously indicated, even with the amendments to the Indian Act under Bill C-31 in 1985, which restored status to Aboriginal women who had married non-Status or non-Aboriginal men, the effects of colonization continue to affect the marginalized positions of Aboriginal women. The patriarchal ideology of European culture has penetrated the traditions of Aboriginal culture. Band councils predominantly consist of men and form policies that continue to deny Aboriginal women their rights, and refuse to consider the marginalization of women as manifested in the overwhelmingly high rates of prostitution and violence against women (CPVAW, 1993). Consequently, women are forced to move to urban centres to find a better quality of life for themselves and their children.

Many Aboriginal scholars, such as Blaney (2006) and Martin-Hill (2006), argue that current Aboriginal tradition is steeped in misogyny. In the same regard, Amadahy (2006) posits that “gender imbalance is a significant barrier to restoring health to our [Aboriginal] communities”. Aboriginal FSW’s engagement in cultural ceremonies in prison facilitated experiences of healing. Music, in particular, was a central component to these ceremonies. However, Amadahy has noted that in some Aboriginal communities, women are discouraged and excluded in musical participation through “traditional” teachings. For example, some teachings state that women should refrain from drumming on their moon time (menstruation). Another teaching is that women should not tie (make) their own drums or they will cause sorrow in their own lives as they “tie up” their own lives. Furthermore, men exclusively play the Pow wow drums in most Aboriginal cultures, and at other ceremonial events women drummers are generally paid less than men (Amadahy). Since, drumming, singing and dancing are integral parts of the healing experience,

[a]ttitudes, teachings and practices in our Aboriginal communities...negate, deny and discourage community support for women’s voices and therefore

deprive the community of another “healing” tool or source of community development (Amadahy, p. 152).

Earlier, discussions on ceremonies as a focal practice suggested that they are “grounded in the underlying reality, and...are heir[s] to the immemorial traditions” (Borgmann, 1992, p. 122). However, the women’s transformative experiences with Aboriginal ceremony while incarcerated challenge this notion of ceremony as reaffirming traditions as a set of practices that are static and frozen in time. The women’s experiences of conscientização suggest that the underlying reality upon which the ceremony is founded upon can be changed by the ceremonial experience itself. According to Amadahy (2006), “tradition is alive, evolving and flexible (p. 154). In this regard, hope for change lies in the practice of ceremony as it is considered a tool for cultivating a more open, supportive, balanced and harmonious society.

Healing was made possible by Aboriginal traditions and ceremonies, which provided a social context for meaningful involvement of participants within the prison community. In turn, the women’s involvement facilitated occasions for joint action and ultimately enacting change within the prison, and thus experiencing empowerment-in-community. For the women’s empowering experiences to continue upon release, opportunities must be available for their involvement in society. These opportunities include a personal dimension, which is related to self-confidence, self-esteem and the women’s willingness to take risks and be persistent when obstacles present themselves (Pedlar, et al., 1999). Another important dimension is the social context, specifically the supports, resources and opportunities that essentially provide a nurturing environment for growth and development in the community (Pedlar et al.). While structures of oppression, such as gender discrimination and the lack of culturally relevant resources and supports continue to exist, hope lies in challenging these oppressive structures through the women’s continued participation in Aboriginal ceremony

and traditions in the larger community. As evidenced by the women and their experiences in prison, engagement in Aboriginal ceremonies and traditions can facilitate the production of knowledge, the development of visions for an optimistic future, and experiences of acceptance, support and commitment from others. Thus, if Aboriginal women were able to begin the process of healing through Aboriginal ceremony in prison, continued involvement in Aboriginal traditions may enable them to move beyond their oppressive and marginalizing experiences in the greater community. Further, the following section argues for the adoption of Aboriginal conceptualizations of justice as an opportunity to improve quality of life for all.

Opportunities for Hope - Adopting Aboriginal Justice

Aboriginal ceremony in GVI provided tangible evidence of healing and restoration, which were congruent with holistic teachings. Monture (1989) argues that, “ [Aboriginal] holistic teachings involve education, spirituality (you say religion), law (we say, living peacefully), family and government” (p. 5). In accordance with the holistic perspective, music is not a separate activity in Aboriginal cultures (Amadahy, 2006). Rather, it is integrated into all aspects of daily life. In other words, Aboriginal traditions of healing involve all aspects of life. Notably the safety, security and love experienced in ceremony by the women are directly related to the Aboriginal philosophy of justice, which begins with encouragement and faith (Ross, 1992). This process of healing mirrors Aboriginal justice in its desire to restore harmony through the preservation of continuing relationships and through the process of negotiation, mediation and restitution (Milward, 2006).

Since the release of *Creating Choices* in 1990, CSC has adopted some of its recommendations and implemented several changes in the management of federal corrections for women. These changes allowed for many Aboriginal women to experience healing, the re-creation of self, and empowerment by engaging in their cultural traditions. However, a healing environment is fragile within a prison. Small changes in policy, such as requiring the

Native Elder and Liaison to do assessments on the women, can inhibit opportunities of empowerment by reinforcing the panoptical eye of the prison and structures of control. In short, the ideology of retributive justice continues to dominant the experiences of FSW.

Monture-Angus (1995) argues that Canada needs to do more than just accommodate the needs of Aboriginal peoples. With regards to the justice system she contends that, “the majority of reforms to the existing system of Canadian justice have attempted to change Aboriginal people so we fit that system (while the system structurally maintains the status quo)” (p. 222). She continues to argue that there is no word for justice in the Ojibwa language. Justice is a process that starts from childhood where children are taught respect and honesty. “Justice” is a collective responsibility which allows for reparation that restores harmony to the community (Baskin, 2006). Hansen (2006), equates Aboriginal justice with the Cree word “opintowin” which involves healing, restoring relationships, accountability, community involvement and ownership. According to Baskin, when a crime has been committed, responsibility is placed on the person who committed the crime to compensate the person(s) who was harmed and to maintain harmony in the community. Thus, the concept of incarceration in fact relieves the offender of any restitution as they are removed from their community. While women’s federal corrections continues to evolve, perhaps one day, as duly noted by Arbour (1996), the distinctive features of Aboriginal justice and healing can be used as a positive force for change.

According to Monture (1989), the holistic perspective of Aboriginal peoples emphasizes the importance of connection and revolves around balance. The structure of First Nation societies is grounded in cooperation and consensus. “In a community which operates on norms of consensus and cooperation, the collective’s rights are the focus” (Monture, p. 6). If dominant society were to adopt these values, the justice system would inherently change from a system of punishment and coercion to restoration and harmony. As Monture argues,

piecemeal changes to legislative structure is to effectively accept the underlying foundation of mainstream society. The federal correctional system for women is only one part of Canada's justice system. While the recommendations of *Creating Choices* represented change that encompassed a more supportive model, it was still based in a system that valued punishment through force and coercion. At the end of the day, Foucault's (1995) analysis of prison as a mechanism of control and coercion based on surveillance and punishment will prevail because of the underlying system that values retribution and punitive measures. As others, such as Arbour (in Markin, 2006) and Faith (2006) have concluded, the prison system for FSW is still failing and has fallen substantially short of the recommendations made in *Creating Choices*.

Restorative and Transformative Justice

The intent of this discussion is not to lead us into a state of despair and hopelessness. Rather, it is to argue for the adoption of Aboriginal values into the justice system and beyond. Hope exists because of the transformative experiences of the Aboriginal FSW in this study. By embracing their Aboriginal identities, Aboriginal FSW found effective ways of healing and coping, and they established meaningful relationships, which were imbued with care, mutual respect, and honesty. Models such as *restorative justice* and *transformative justice* have been emerging across Canada. These models are grounded in Aboriginal philosophies. Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie (2005) describe restorative justice as "a modern restatement of traditional [Aboriginal] values of balance between those in conflict and within their communities, and signifies an approach to crime and conflict that heals parties through embracing them and their place in symbiosis while simultaneously rejecting the destructive act that sundered them" (p. vii).

Similar to Aboriginal law, relationships are central in the restorative justice philosophy. Crime is not merely a violation of the law, it is a violation of relationships. As

Zehr (1990) explains, according to the restorative justice philosophy, “crime is a violation of people and relations. It creates obligations to make things right. Justice involves the victim, the offender, and the community in search for solutions which promote repair, reconciliation and reassurance” (p. 188). In other words, there are three stakeholders involved in the process of restorative justice, the victim, the offender and the community, and all parties must be involved in order to effectively heal from and prevent crime.

Rather than determining blame and imposing punishment, which occurs in the conventional model of justice, restorative justice emphasizes the needs all stakeholders (victim, offender, community), as well as offender and community responsibility. Restorative justice provides the opportunity for offenders to understand the harm that they have caused and take responsibility for what they have done. Through the restorative justice process, coercion and exclusion are minimized as voluntary participation of the offender is maximized (Zehr, 2002). Although victims’ needs are the starting point for restorative justice, offender and community needs are also considered (Zehr, 1990). As evidenced in the life experiences of many of the FSW involved in this study, offenders have also encountered victimization. Zehr contends that trauma is the core experience of victims as well as offenders. He states, “much violence may actually be a reenactment of trauma which was experienced earlier, but not responded to adequately” (p. 31). The retributive model creates more experiences of trauma by severing relationships through the legal and correctional systems. Instead of invoking more destruction of relationships through the separation of offenders from their community, restorative justice seeks to heal through inclusive and collaborative processes. In a study by Latimer, Dowden, and Muise (2005), restorative justice approaches were found to be more satisfactory than nonrestorative practices. Specifically, restorative justice programs were found to generate higher victim and offender satisfaction, greater offender compliance with restitution, and lower recidivism rates than nonrestorative approaches.

Restorative justice program and principles can occur at various stages of the criminal justice process (Dickson-Gilmore & La Prairie, 2005). That is, they can be applied in the context of prevention (e.g., a diversion program before criminal charges are laid), part of the sentencing process (e.g., a forum for meetings between the offender(s) and victim(s)), or as a part of the offender's actual sentence (e.g., a community-based sentence, a part of the parole-release process). According to Latimer et al. (2005), there are three main models of restorative justice: circles, victim-offender mediation, and conferences. The concept of circles originally stems from First Nations communities in Canada (Zehr, 2002). Much like the Talking and Healing Circles the women experienced in prison, all participants of a circle are given the opportunity to share and expected to demonstrate respect, integrity, and honesty (Zehr). Sentencing circles are used after a guilty plea or a finding of guilt has been entered and have been predominantly used in Yukon and Saskatchewan (Dickson-Gilmore & La Prairie). These circles are used to reach an agreement with the community as to what would be a reasonable sentence.

Victim-offender mediation primarily involves victims and offenders. Initially, victims and offenders work separately with a facilitator and then, upon their agreement, are brought together in a meeting (Zehr). This gathering is facilitated by a trained mediator. Conferences generally expand from victim-offender mediation to include family members or other individuals (Zehr). Zehr emphasizes "that not all restorative approaches involve a direct encounter" (p. 52). In other words, direct contact between the offender, the victim, and the community that was affected is not absolutely necessary for healing and restoration to occur. Healing and restoration can be found through other kinds of interaction that are more general in nature. For example, community members who were not directly affected by the actions of certain offenders can be engaged with those offenders and still experience healing.

Leisure may be understood as an opportunity for offenders and community members to participate in more general restorative practices. Yuen et al. (2006), suggest that leisure experiences that involve members of the community and inmates in the prison have the potential to engage participants in restorative justice. Their study indicates that stereotypical beliefs of volunteers and incarcerated women can be challenged in the context of a leisure experience. Specifically, they state, “volunteers discovered or were reminded that an incarcerated woman could be their neighbour, their colleague, their friend, or even themselves...the FSW were able to experience that they could be accepted by society and that people actually cared about them” (p. 31). Involvement of community members in restorative justice gives them a sense of ownership and empowerment by informing them of their roles and responsibilities in working toward more inclusive and accountable communities.

Community involvement is critical to the restorative justice process. As argued by Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie (2005), restorative justice should be a grassroots initiative which stems from a community’s desire to improve its ability to deal with conflict. Consequently, they urge an examination of the degree to which the community welcomes and has the resources to support the restorative justice process. Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie further illustrate that the community must be made accountable and accept some responsibility for creating and rehabilitating the offender. However, crime affects a community’s sense of unity by affecting people’s sense of trust, which can contribute to feelings of suspicion and estrangement (Zehr, 1990). Thus, Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie also state that the offender must be made accountable to the community and the individual victims. Ultimately, the goal of restorative justice is achieved through the restoration of relationships, thereby creating stronger, more responsive communities.

Like restorative justice, transformative justice includes victims, offenders and communities in collaborative efforts to find healing solutions. In addition to this approach,

transformative justice also considers system structure of power and control, oppressive experiences of the past and distributive injustice (Morris, 2000). Some researchers, such as Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie (2005) suggest that restorative justice influences both criminal justice reform and social justice reform as it has the capacity to restore and transform communities by changing the way criminal justice is administered, particularly for Aboriginal communities. Specifically, they state “restorative justice is transformative justice...restorative justice is not only about criminal justice — it is the means by which social justice will be achieved and communities almost ‘magically’ transformed” (p. 91). As noted earlier, restorative justice is a grassroots initiative, which thus requires communities to have the capacity and resources that will enable its members to adequately support the restorative process. As emphasized by Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie little attention has been given to the idea and reality of crucial elements, such as community and culture, in the Aboriginal restorative justice movement.

As discussed earlier, the enduring system of colonization had and continues to have a devastating impact on the traditional cultures and institutions that once defined and maintained Aboriginal communities. As Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie (2005) indicate, “interpersonal violence, property crime, family problems, and other forms of social tension, friction, and disorder occur in Aboriginal communities at levels far exceeding the national and regional one” (p.111-112). Consequently, they contest that Aboriginal communities will have to deal with restorative justice projects that are serious, violent and interpersonal; conflicts that have caused proponents of restorative justice to question the suitability of the restorative process for these types of cases.

Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie (2005) highlighted three major issues that render restorative justice in contemporary Aboriginal communities difficult. The first problem is related to the divisions and tensions embedded within the history of individuals, families and

community. Longstanding conflict may make it difficult for the sustainability of the restorative process. The second issue is in regards to the importance Aboriginal cultures place upon kinship, extended family or clan networks. Such networks once played a strong role in crime prevention and even acted in a supportive role to conflict resolution. However, Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie argue that today these relationship may work against successful conflict resolution. The third problem is related to the violence in Aboriginal communities, particularly the family violence and sexual abuse. This is highly relevant because of the amount and normalization of family violence and abuse in Aboriginal communities. Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie (2005) further explain with the following statement:

[Some] argue that there is a place for restorative justice in domestic violence because the use of the criminal justice system is, by itself, too narrow and confining for women who do not want their partners charged and/or incarcerated. Still others maintain that restorative justice is inappropriate because of power differentials either between victim and offender or within communities, and because of the difficulty of ensuring the safety of victims (p. 127).

Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie's (2005) concerns relate directly back to issues of community and its ability to support the restorative process. Restorative justice is not a panacea for Canada's justice system and may, in certain circumstances, be capable of reinforcing systems of oppression and inequity. To consider restorative justice as a better form of justice than the current system, Daly (2001, in Dickson & La Prairie, 2005) asserts that different awareness of cultural diversities and relations of inequality must be addressed.

Nonetheless, programs such as the Mi'kmaq Young Offenders Project in Cape Breton, Canada (Nova Scotia Department of Justice, 1998), the peacemaking circles at a community-

based organization called Rosa Inc. in Massachusetts, United States (Boyes-Watson, 2006), and the inclusion of an Aboriginal peacemaker in the court system by the Tsuu T'ina in Alberta, Canada (Hurlbert, 2006), are a few examples of where Aboriginal philosophies of justice are making a positive difference. Another example is the restorative justice program in Nova Scotia, which was introduced in 1998 by Nova Scotia's Department of Justice (Nova Scotia Department of Justice, 1998).

Phase one of Nova Scotia's restorative justice program was implemented in 1999 and targeted youth between the ages of twelve and seventeen in the regional municipalities of Halifax and Cape Breton, and the rural areas of Annapolis Valley and Cumberland County (Clairmont, 2005; Nova Scotia Department of Justice). Eventually, the initiative aims to provide the opportunity for all offenders in Nova Scotia to participate in the restorative justice process. In accordance with the Aboriginal model of problem-solving and dialogue (Monture, 1989), Nova Scotia's Department of Justice (1998) states: "No admission, confession or statement made by the offender in the course of restorative justice discussion will be admissible in evidence against that person in later proceedings" (p. 21). This process ultimately rejects Canada's conventional model of surveillance and punishment. The Nova Scotia initiative is particularly striking because the program is attempting to change the foundation of Canada's justice system, from retribution and punishment to restoration and accountability.

Further, Nova Scotia Department of Justice (1998) explicitly states:

The government should not become the de facto deliverer of restorative justice programs. Individual communities should be empowered to shape these programs and to deliver the service of restorative justice (p. 12)

This approach encompasses Pedlar et al. (1999) conditions for empowerment-in-community (knowledge, aspirations, social commitment, openness), and most importantly the condition

of openness, which has the potential to lead to opportunities to learn, find hope and develop meaningful and supportive connections with others. Furthermore, this approach enables Aboriginal and other communities to find restorative solutions that resonate with their culture and traditions. In accordance with Young's (1995) politics of difference, conformity for social wholeness and unity are not required. The politics of difference is particularly significant for Aboriginal peoples as they strive to rebuild the nations that existed prior to colonization. In this process, as experienced by the Aboriginal FSW in their personal healing journeys through engagement in their cultural traditions, those involved may find strength, inspiration, and hope. The dialectic approach of restorative justice processes also provides opportunities for participants to transform their lived experiences into knowledge as they pursue reparation for the harm that has been done. Such discussions may lead to conscientização, and thus transformative justice as they consider system oppressive experiences of the past and persistent structures of power and control.

Thus far, Canada's legislation related to Aboriginal peoples has attempted to change their value systems, traditions, and cultures to fit the existing dominant ideology of justice. Healing, relationships, accountability, and ownership, which are central components in Aboriginal conceptualizations of justice, have been cast aside by the dominant construction of justice as retribution and punishment. Consequently, the holistic teachings of Aboriginal peoples that enable healing to occur in all aspects of life have been fractured into compartmentalized places for healing, such as sessions with the psychologist. Further, equitable relationships of love, care, and trust, which provide the foundation of safety and security required for healing, have been replaced with formal relationships grounded in organizational bureaucracy. Adopting Aboriginal justice as the dominant force in Canada's correctional system could be a viable option for all to heal. Models, such as restorative justice, which stem from Aboriginal conceptualizations of justice already exist in some

provincial systems across the country. By fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment, Aboriginal justice facilitates the development of more harmonious and interconnected communities. The understanding, accountability, and responsibility fostered in the restorative process may also facilitate a more inclusive and supportive society toward Aboriginal peoples. The following section discusses empowerment-in-community as an important component for “successful integration” of Aboriginal female offenders.

“Successful Integration”

While “successful integration” for Aboriginal FSW was not overtly defined by the women, the women appeared to suggest that it would include opportunities for empowerment, particularly with respect to opportunities to receive, as well as opportunities to contribute. It appears as though Aboriginal FSW were striving to resist oppressive structures that reinforced their positions of reliance and forced compliance. Rather than continue their position as wards of the state, Aboriginal FSW wanted to be engaged in their healing by gaining a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage, developing meaningful relationships, and living a life of hope by finding opportunities to take action for what they believe. One Aboriginal FSW, Maria, spoke positively of her plans for integration following her release from GVI. She spoke confidently of the supports and resources she would have. Notably, these supports were Aboriginal resources that were going to help her with finding employment, continuing her education, and managing her health concerns and addictions. When asked why these Aboriginal supports were important, Maria replied, *“Because I’m actually getting involved with my heritage and everything. And that’s one thing that I think I’m missing from my life, is getting into the Aboriginal ways which I never did before”*. Exploration into these Aboriginal resources of support would further the understanding of female Aboriginal offenders’ experiences of healing in the community. Aboriginal

organizations, such as the *At^Lohsa Native Family Healing Services Incorporated*¹⁵ and the *Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre*¹⁶, would contribute to the knowledge of experiences that foster or deter pathways to healing and ultimately aid in the development of other much needed Aboriginal supports and resources in the community for female offenders.

It can be argued the empowerment-in-community, wherein the character of equitable and caring relationships and the commitment to healing are critical to a socially just society, is particularly relevant to Aboriginal women. Spears (2006) contends, “We [Aboriginal women] can hold state and civic institutions responsible for their genocidal practices, but that will not ultimately solve our distress. *We are responsible for our own healing, and we are strong enough to achieve it*” (emphasis added, p. 94). Strength, in turn, flows from conscientização. As Martin-Hill (2006) contends:

We, as women, tend to position traditional male Elders, healers, or spiritual guides on a pedestal, which fuels an oppressive relationship. It is not men we must elevate, but our Creator, spirit guides and children. Our men are our equals, our partners— we should cherish one another mutually. We need to turn to our grandmothers and restore their position in our communities (p. 118).

Thus, as experienced by Aboriginal FSW, Martin-Hill is suggesting Aboriginal women in the community must continue to *collectively* pursue their rights as Aboriginals and as women. This process involves returning to cultural traditions, or *coming home*, but it also entails the re-creation of Aboriginal identity – one that is filled with pride and one that consists of balanced interdependency and a renewal of trust and true respect. According to Proulx

¹⁵ *At^Lohsa Native Family Healing Services Inc.* which offers healing and recovery of Native families through a holistic approach (At^Lohsa Native Family Healing Services Inc, 2007).

¹⁶ *Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre* (SOAHAC), which offers traditional, holistic healing programs that provide access to and increase knowledge of natural medicines and traditional ceremonies (SOAHAC, 2007). The centre also offers services related to mental health, maternal and child health, nutrition and diabetes (SOAHAC, 2007).

(2003), “tradition is contingent upon the particular culture and the history of change that the culture has undergone” (p. 37). As Fernandez concludes, “Our path must come to create a spiral, one that turns back to the past while at the same time progressing forward in order to survive in a different world” (p. 254).

While Aboriginal peoples continue to experience systems of oppression, they have been able to create initiatives which address the needs and cultural sensitivities of their people. Such initiatives include the aforementioned, *At^Lohsa Native Family Healing Services Incorporated* and *Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre*. Another example includes the *Community Council Project (CCP)* in Toronto. The CCP is an Aboriginal-run diversion program that was created in response to the over-incarceration of Aboriginal peoples (Proulx, 2003). Such initiatives are examples of movements from disempowerment to empowerment and experiences of healing as individuals and communities go from “doing it ‘their way’ to doing it ‘our way’” (Proulx, p. 185) and reclaiming responsibility. However, it must be re-emphasized that while there may be services for Aboriginal peoples, the indications are that Aboriginal FSW are rarely informed of these services.

Aboriginal FSW have endured histories of trauma and abuse; they have experienced near annihilation of their culture and tradition through the Indian Act, and identities and families have been shattered as a result of these experiences. The women’s journeys along the Red Road have just begun and much more needs to be done so that these women can continue along this path of healing. If I had one word to describe the Aboriginal FSW, I worked with, it would be *strong*. The strength of these women was constant and can be symbolized with the beat of their drum. Amadahy (2006) describes the drum an instrument that contains feminine spirits, thereby fostering peace and unity. She further illustrates that the beat of the drum signifies the heartbeat of our Mother, the Earth— the ultimate source of

life. Leisure as ceremony from an Aboriginal perspective is integrated in all aspects of life and represents re-creation, restoration and collective strength. It is in this sense that Aboriginal women found freedom, even within the confines of a federal prison. It is in this sense that Aboriginal women gained strength, for with each step these women take along the Red Road, the drum beats on.

Coming Home

The Aboriginal FSW's experiences with traditional ceremonies in prison suggest that leisure can be used as a context for healing, empowerment-in-community, and re-creation. Ultimately, the women's experiences of leisure suggest that leisure can be used as a mechanism for change. This potential lies in the freedom found within the leisure experience. The women's freedom encompassed freedom from the oppressive structures of the prison and its panoptical eye of surveillance and punishment, and freedom to simply be without judgement or fear. Healing occurred through collective experiences of solidarity, resistance and transformation. Empowerment-in-community was facilitated through opportunities for the production and application of knowledge, the development of hopes and dreams, and the experience of commitment and social support from others. Re-creation was fostered through processes of conscientização— dialogue, reflection, and action. Liberating experiences facilitated opportunities for the women to rediscover and restore their heritage and culture as one that they could be proud of.

The quality of relationships can be understood as the thread that connected the social fabric of the women's lives, which fostered their transformative experiences of healing, empowerment, and re-creation. These relationships, characterized by unconditional support, love, acceptance, mutual respect, commitment, and faith were developed and maintained through traditional Aboriginal ceremonies. Equitable relationships that involved receiving care and caring for others were particularly important in the growth and development of the

women. Women's engagement with others and portrayals of an ethic of care in ceremony invoked inspiration and strength. The relations of community generated a network of resources which enabled the women to create change within the correctional setting. It is my hope that these relationships will continue and other relations of community will develop upon the women's release. Specifically, I would suggest that CSC support the development of relationships between FSW and the greater community so that the "ecosystem" established within the prison is more easily transferred upon release. In other words, access to and opportunities to participate in community life are available, and individuals are ready to support FSW in their participation through connections to knowledge, resources, and other people in the community. These relationships cannot be used to further the panoptical gaze of the institution, rather they must be based on acceptance, mutual respect, commitment and faith. Leisure, particularly Aboriginal ceremonies, can be used as the social context to support the development and maintenance of these relationships. Leisure experiences that provide a foundation for relations of community have the potential for creating change in society by fostering openness and larger circles of empowerment-in-community.

In accordance with the discussion on the importance of relationships characterized by unconditional support and commitment, I have no intention of severing ties with the women I have worked with as my dissertation comes to an end. I intend to continue my relationship with both Aboriginal FSW and community members who are committed to supporting the healing journeys of the Aboriginal community. More research, services and resources are required to support Aboriginal FSW as they continue their walk on the Red Road. I shall continue to attend Sisterhood meetings and the Sweats in the prison in the capacity of volunteer, friend, and researcher. In terms of my role as an academic, I hope to work with Aboriginal female offenders in the community to identify meaningful sources of support and opportunities for healing in the community.

The recent event of an inmate suicide at GVI is evidence of a failing system. Again, justice as retribution and punishment prevails as criminal charges are laid against three correctional officers in relation to the suicide¹⁷. This outcome masks a punitive system that is inherently destructive. Rather than further the destruction of relationships and the harm that has been done, it is my hope that this incident will cause Canada's criminal justice system to re-evaluate its correctional approach and adopt a more restorative understanding of justice. That is, a more Aboriginal conceptualization of justice— once that encompasses healing, restoring relationships, accountability and community involvement.

The argument of adopting Aboriginal philosophies is not limited to the correctional system alone. According to Monture-Angus (1995) “regulating Aboriginal Peoples to a removed corner of experience also fundamentally denies the mainstream the opportunity to benefit and learn from the culture and ways of the Aboriginal nations” (p. 222). Rather than continue to minimize Aboriginal cultures and traditions as a relic of the past, Aboriginal philosophy and traditions ought to be considered as a viable opportunity to improve quality of life for all. “Part of the healing work that needs to be done”, urge Leclair, Nicholson, and Hartley (2006), “is to refute the notion that we [Aboriginal peoples] are alive only in history books or ancient records. We are still here, still living on our land, albeit in very different circumstances than our ancestors” (p. 57). Transformation is a part of humanity; we are meant to consistently partake in the creation and re-creation of history and culture. As Canadian society evolves, perhaps we can consider Aboriginal ways of life, where hope exists in inclusive and collaborative processes, and in the preservation of relationships.

¹⁷ Please see articles in Kitchener-Waterloo's local newspaper, *The Record* by Davis (2007) and Dalton (2007) for more information regarding this incident.

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APPENDIX A – Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE RESEARCH ON HOUSING NEEDS AND PREFERENCES OF WOMEN WHEN RELEASED FROM GVI (under Correctional supervision)

Preamble

Thank you very much for meeting with us. As you know, we are speaking with people to find out what sorts of housing needs and preferences they have, as well as what they expect to be their most likely destination after release from GVI. This work is being carried out through the Reintegration Committee here at GVI and with Alison Pedlar who is a professor from the University of Waterloo. Our goal is to gain a solid understanding of what it is people see themselves needing when they leave here in the way of housing and to see how closely that matches what is available to people. Your involvement in this research is very valuable to this project. Thank you.

We ask that you respond to these questions as though where you go on release is in no way pre-determined. For instance, if you currently think you are bound for a half-way house in Toronto or Barrie, say, or if you are headed directly home or to stay with a family member or relative, let's try to think as though nothing were pre-determined, but simply tell me what you believe your needs and preferences are, quite apart from what you know about where you will probably be headed on release. The goal is to dig into what people really would prefer, but also to recognize that there is a reality here that we have to respect. We have to understand what is really feasible in the first place. As well, what you tell me is not intended to change nor will it change where you do actually go, because this project is essentially concerned with long-range planning and that is why your participation is so important in terms of the help it will give in the long term, not necessarily for you or people here now, but maybe down the road, for women who come after you.

I'm going to ask some questions which deal with housing needs and preferences. If there is anything here that you would prefer not to discuss, that is fine. And if there are things we have not addressed that you feel should be included, please let me know. All information you provide is considered completely confidential and your name will not be attached to any specific piece of information that is contained in our final report. We should point out that loss of confidentiality occurs only if any communication between us suggests actions of self-harm or harm to others. Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose to participate or not, it will in no way affect your sentence, nor will it affect your participation in any programs at GVI or elsewhere.

With your permission, I will turn on the tape recorder now, so that we can be sure we accurately record all the information you give us.

=====

Research note: These questions may vary according to the person's individual situation.

Interviewer: Aim to ensure that you obtain as much information as possible on each question, asking participant to expand for specifics – for example, *Why is that? Can you tell me what that means? How much or how often is that needed? Is there any alternative? If yes, what would that be?*

To begin with, can you tell me a little bit about yourself – do you have children? Can you tell me your age? Do you know when you might leave GVI? And you've been here a while?

1a) Everyone has certain needs and preferences in terms of where they live. And often those needs mean that we need to have access to **formal** support services, for instance, a doctor, or rehab of some sort, or transportation. The list can be quite long. Can you tell me what you believe your needs for formal support services will look like once you leave here?

Probes: What about access to other services, such as:

Transportation	
Financial management	
Ontario Works	
Employment support services	
Training opportunities	
Education/school	
Daycare for children	
School for children	
Counselling/family/individual	
Dialectic Behavioural Therapy	
Medical doctor*	
Addiction recovery*	
Mental health services*	
Anger management	
Volunteer opportunities	
Healing Circles, drum circles, Sweat Lodges	
Aboriginal programming (e.g., <i>Circles of Change</i>)	
Other	

1b) With respect to **formal** supports, can you think of any way your release plan could be enhanced or made better for you? (*Seek specifics*)

2a) We all have needs and preferences around **informal** support networks too. Informal support refers to things like access to our family – children, parents, partners, brothers, sisters, other family members, as well as friends, church circle or other spiritual connections we may have. On release, what would you see as important to you in terms of accessing informal supports?

Probes: What about access to *(in each instance, seek specifics)*

Partners	
Children/grandchildren	
Family (including parents and siblings)	
Friends	
Spiritual support	
Leisure/free time	
Native Elder	
Other	

2b) Are there some **informal** connections or relationships that you would **not** want to have access to, or them to have access to you? Can you tell me why? *(Again, seek specifics).*

2c) With respect to **informal** supports, can you think of any way your release plan could be enhanced or made better for you? *(specifics?)*

3a) What sort or type of housing do you feel you would need after leaving GVI and while still under Correctional supervision? And why is that? *(Seek specifics in each case)*

Halfway house	
Private home placement	
Treatment facility	
YWCA	
Motel	
Shelter	
Other	
Other	

3b) Again, with respect to housing, do you think your release plan could be improved? *(Seek specifics)*

4a) What about the actual location of where you would most prefer to live? What community or geographic location? Why is that? Would you go there whether or not the supports you identified were available? Why is that?

4b) If you couldn't go there, what would be your second most preferred location? Why is that? Would you go there whether or not the supports you identified were available? Why is that?

5) At the end of the day, what do you think is/are the most important thing/s for you to be able to successfully reintegrate into the community? Can you tell me why that is?

APPENDIX B – Information and Recruitment Letter for Interview with Staff

Date

Dear _____,

As you may know, I am a PhD student at the University of Waterloo and have been doing research with the Native Sisterhood for the past two years. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of major Aboriginal cultural events on the identity development, empowerment, healing and rehabilitation of federally sentenced women. Specifically, Aboriginal traditions such as Sweat Lodges and Healing/Talking Circles will be examined. Your involvement in this research would be a valuable contribution to this project.

Participation in this project is voluntary. It involves a face-to-face meeting for approximately forty-five minutes. Questions will be centered around your experiences working with federally sentenced women, how you think the Aboriginal traditions in Grand Valley Institution affect the federally sentenced women, and also how these cultural experiences affect you personally. The goal is to understand your perspective both as a facilitator and also as a participant of these traditions, which I believe will provide a deeper understanding of the meaning of these cultural experiences on the rehabilitation and healing journey of federally sentenced women.

You will be asked some questions that deal with your participation in traditional Aboriginal ceremonies such as Sweat Lodges, Aboriginal Day, and Pow Wows. If there is anything that you would prefer not to discuss, that is fine. And if there are things that have not been addressed that you feel should be included, please let me know. All information you provide is considered completely confidential and your name will not be attached to any specific piece of information that is contained in the final report. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

With your permission, I would like to audio-tape record the discussion in order to be sure not to miss important information people provide. The tapes would be destroyed as soon as they have been transcribed. Transcriptions of the tapes would be held in a locked filing cabinet in my office for approximately one year, until the data have been analyzed and a final report prepared. Then the transcripts will be confidentially destroyed. The electronic data will be kept indefinitely on a secure University of Waterloo server.

You can choose not to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. And should you decide to withdraw from this study at any time you are entirely free to do so by advising me, Felice Yuen. All information you provide is considered completely confidential and no one will be identified by name in any report or document that we produce during or at the end of the study. Therefore, pseudonyms will be inserted into the transcripts to ensure that no-one can be identified in any report or document we prepare.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 519-888-4567, Ext. 33894, or by email at fyuen@ahsmail.uwaterloo.ca. This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please

contact Dr. Susan Sykes, Director of the Office of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 Ext. 36005 or my advisor Dr. Alison Pedlar at (519) 888-4567 Ext. 33758.

I look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours sincerely,

Felice Yuen

APPENDIX C – Interview Guide for Interviews with “Staff”

Interview Guide (staff)

1. How long have you been participating in traditional Aboriginal ceremonies such as Sweats and Pow Wows?
2. Can you describe how participating in these traditions makes you feel? Can you give some examples of your experiences?
3. What do you think the meaning behind these traditions are? What is the purpose?
4. How long have you been working with Aboriginal FSW?
5. How do you think current the Aboriginal programming and cultural events impact the women?
6. What do you think is/are the primary concerns for Aboriginal FSW?
7. What kinds of suggestions would do you have for CSC in terms of providing effective interventions for Aboriginal Female Offenders?

APPENDIX D – Staff Consent Form

Consent Form

I agree to participate in the study being conducted by Felice Yuen at the University of Waterloo. I agree to participate in an audio-tape recorded focus group during which we shall discuss initial interpretations of the data and create a drum song. I have made this decision based on the information I have been given in the attached invitation letter. I will not be identified in any report or publication that results from this study and all information I provide will be treated as confidential. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time without penalty by telling Felice Yuen at the University of Waterloo. My participation is entirely voluntary.

I also understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance from the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. If I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I can contact Dr. Susan Sykes at the Office of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 Ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES NO

I agree to have my interview tape recorded.

YES NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Witness Name: _____ (Please print)

Witness Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX E – Focus Group Guide

Focus Group Guide

Materials: Paper, pens, flip chart, digital recorder, markers

Length: Approximately 3 hours

Introduction:

[With the participants' permission, the digital recorder will be on] Before we begin, I would like to formally acknowledge your participation and express my gratitude for your willingness to share. I would like to offer you tobacco as a representation of my contract with you to honour your confidentiality and the sacredness of the exchange to come. Excerpts from our discussion may be used in the final report, but they will be anonymous. In keeping with the tradition of Talking Circles, I would like to remind everyone that what is said in the Circle stays in the Circle. I do have to mention that loss of confidentiality occurs if any communication between us suggests actions of self-harm or harm to others, as well as in the event of undisclosed crimes against children for which you or another person have not been charged.

I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have about the study [field questions at this time].

As I stated earlier, your agreement to participate is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at anytime without affect your sentence or your participation in any programs at GVI or elsewhere.

At this time it is your choice whether you wish to accept my tobacco offering as a representation of your consent to participate in the study or sign the consent form. If you choose to accept my tobacco offering, you are agreeing to participate in this study, you're okay with the discussion being tape recorded and you're okay with the use of anonymous quotations being used in any thesis or publication.

Part One (1 hour):

1. Invite collaborators sit in a circle.
2. Turn on digital recorder.
3. Ask the women to answer the following three questions:
 - a. Who are you at Grand Valley Institution?
 - b. How do you think the prison authorities see you?
 - c. Who do you want to be when you grow up?

Encourage the women to think about these questions spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally. As well, seek reflection on the experiences of the Aboriginal celebrations and traditions themselves. This incorporates the holistic perspective of the Aboriginal people.

4. Pass the digital recorder to the woman on the left (always move in the direction of Mother Earth) and listen to her answer. Repeat until all the collaborators have spoken.
5. Allow time for further discussion once every woman has spoken.

Part Two (2 hours)

1. [Turn on digital recorder] Tell them that Wanda and Delores are here to help us write a Native Sisterhood drum song (all the women know Wanda and Delores, who regularly comes into the GVI to lead the Sweats).
2. Wanda will explain the process used in creating a drum song.
3. Women will collectively decided upon the vocables for the song (According to Wanda, vocables are sounds consisting of one syllable).
4. Record the rendition on the flipchart.
5. Once the women agree on the vocables, the women will brainstorm sets of lyrics that contain the same number of syllables in the vocables.
6. Record the brainstorm on the flipchart.
7. Collectively decide on which lyrics will be used.
8. Collectively decide on the drumbeats.

APPENDIX F – Script of Verbal Invitation to members of the Native Sisterhood to Participate in the Focus Group

Hello, as many of you know, my name is Felice and I'm a PhD student at the University of Waterloo. I've been working with Norma, the Native Elder and some members of the Sisterhood on a study, which is looking at the effects of major Aboriginal cultural traditions that take place at Grand Valley on the identity development, empowerment, healing and rehabilitation of federally sentenced women.

Some of you have already participated in the interviews which took place last summer. Those interviews were for this study as well as a larger study, led by my advisor Dr. Alison Pedler at the University of Waterloo, related to your housing needs upon release. In order to gain a deeper understanding of your experiences with the Sisterhood and Native traditions such as the Sweat Lodge, Wanda (Sweat facilitator) and I would like to run a sort of workshop with you to create a Sisterhood drum song. The creation of this song will be centered around who you are and who you want to become in relation to your own identity development, empowerment and healing. In addition, I would like to discuss some initial findings of the study with you. These findings are based on some initial analysis of the interview data. I'm proposing that this take place during the regular Sisterhood meeting time, on Monday, April 16, 2007 from 6:00pm to 9:00.

With your permission, I would like to audio-tape the session in order to be sure not to miss important information you provide. The tapes would be destroyed as soon as they have been transcribed. The transcripts will be destroyed after the data have been analyzed and a final report prepared. The tapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The electronic data will be stored for an indefinite amount of time on a secure University of Waterloo server.

Only my supervisor, Dr. Alison Pedlar, and I will have access to these data.

This project was reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Waterloo's Office of Research Ethics.

Just as your participation in the interviews was voluntary, your participation in the creation of the drum song is voluntary. You can also choose not to respond to questions or withdraw at anytime. Please let me know if you are interested and please pass this invitation on to any other member of the Sisterhood who is not here. Thank you for listening.

APPENDIX G –Consent Form for the Focus Group

Consent Form

I agree to participate in the study being conducted by Felice Yuen at the University of Waterloo. I agree to participate in an audio-tape recorded focus group during which we shall discuss initial interpretations of the data and create a drum song. I have made this decision based on the information I have been given in verbal invitation made by Felice Yuen. I will not be identified in any report or publication that results from this study and all information I provide will be treated as confidential. I have noted that loss of confidentiality occurs if any communication between us suggests actions of self-harm or harm to others, as well as in the event of undisclosed crimes against children for which I or another person have not been charged. I have had the opportunity to receive any further details I wanted about the study. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time without penalty by telling Felice Yuen at the University of Waterloo. My participation is entirely voluntary. Whether I choose to participate in this study or not, it will in no way affect my sentence, nor will it affect my participation in any programs at GVI or elsewhere.

I also understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance from the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. If I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I can contact Dr. Susan Sykes at the Office of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 Ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.
 YES NO

I agree to have my interview tape recorded.
 YES NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.
 YES NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Witness Name: _____ (Please print)

Witness Signature: _____

Date: _____