LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FIRST NATIONS GIRLS:

EXPLORING THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES OF IDENTITY FORMATION

THROUGH NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS

STEPHANIE MCKENZIE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN PSYCHOLOGY

YORK UNIVERSITY

TORONTO, ONTARIO

JANUARY 2024

Abstract

Through narrative interviews, I explored the developmental and relational processes associated with identity formation of 16 First Nations (Anishinaabe) adolescent girls aged 12 to 18 years. I used an inductive thematic analysis approach to prioritize the girls' voices in their stories. The girls shared developmental and relational ways of understanding themselves in relationship to others and their world. Based on the analyses of the girls' interviews, I proposed three themes of identity development processes: Being (present development), Becoming (active exploration), and Envisioning (future-oriented lens of what is to come). In all these processes, the girls commented close relationships that were vital in supporting their emerging understanding of themselves. The results point to a wholistic and integrated model of Anishinaabe girls' processes of identity development in which their personal and relational selves were integrated, there is an understanding of the continuity of the self, and a recognition of the key influences from their close relationships. For Indigenous youth, elucidating the processes of identity carries utility in understanding the strength, preservation, and continuity of the self, withstanding 500 years of colonialism (Pitawanakwat, 2006; Chandler et al., 2013).

Acknowledgements

These accomplishments are not my own as my work has been enriched by a community of supports. First, I would like to note my deepest thanks to the Creator who provided me life, and unforeseeable strength and perseverance. Special thanks to my family who always had faith in me – Lynn, Robert, Jessica, Aloysia, Victoria, and Diana.

I recognize the commitment of my supervisors, Drs. Debra Pepler and Nicole Muir (Métis) who supported me to do this work in a good way. I am indebted to their generosity of sharing their immense wisdom and direction with me gathered through working alongside Indigenous communities. They both spent long hours with me on coding, analysing, editing, all in good company and celebration. This work was also made possible through Drs. Kirsten Madsen, Debra Pepler, and Susan Dion in partnership Dilico Anishinabek Family Care. I express my gratitude for the girls who shared their lived experiences used in this data. I am grateful to Drs. Mary Desrocher and Kiera Brant-Birioukov who served as committee members.

Thank you to Indigenous scholars, mentors, and friends for your unwavering support and friendship, especially Nancy Louit-Gonzalez (Flint Knife), Susan Ball (Minwendam/ “she who has joy”), Jenna Barnhardt, Melissa Major, and the Centre for Indigenous Student Services. I am grateful for my faith community. A special thanks to Opaskwayak Education Authority who supported my post-secondary education, as well as, my home community, Opaskwayak Cree Nation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ii

Acknowledgements iii

Table of Contents iv

List of Figures vi

List of Tables vii

Self-Location 1

Introduction 3

Indigenous Perspectives on Meaning Making 5

Colonialism: Impact on Indigenous Girls' Identity 11

Indigenous Identity Research 16

The Current Study 20

Method 21

Truth Gathering Process 21

Qualitative Analysis 23

Ethical Considerations 26

Results 28

Defining Being, Becoming, and Envisioning 29

Conceptualizing Domains 30

Theme 1: Being 32

Theme 2: Becoming 40

Theme 3: Envisioning 49

Discussion: Indigenous Girls' Threading Their Identity through Weaving the Ribbon Skirt 57

Preliminary Findings 58

Overarching Themes 58
Domains, Subthemes, and Codes 60
Domain of Personal and Relational Selves. 60
Domain of the Influences of Identity Development. 66
Limitations 69
Research and Clinical Implications 71
Directions for Future Research 73
Conclusion 74
References 76
APPENDICES 95
Appendix A 95
Appendix B 96
Appendix C 100
Appendix D 101
Appendix E 102
Appendix F 103

List of Figures

Figure 1: The Relational Determinants of Indigenous Identity Development Model

Figure 2: Strawberry Analogy: Labelling Categories in Inductive Thematic Analysis

Figure 3: Themes, Domains, and Subthemes of Anishinaabe Girls' Identity Development

Figure 4: Anishinaabe Girls' Stage of Being and its Subsequent Domains and Subthemes

Figure 5: Anishinaabe Girls' Stage of Becoming and its Subsequent Domains and Subthemes

Figure 6: Anishinaabe Girls' Stage of Envisioning and its Subsequent Domains and Subthemes

Figure 7a & 7b: The Nature of the Processes of Identity Development

Figure 8: Ribbon Skirt Analogy of Being, Becoming, and Envisioning

Figure 9: Systems of Influence on Identity Development

List of Tables

Table 1: Six Phases Adapted from Braun and Clarke's (2006) Guidelines on Thematic Analysis

Self-Location

Consistent with Indigenous ways of knowing (Absolon & Willett, 2005), I begin by situating myself to lay the context in which I am grounded. In doing so, I intend to convey my limited capacity in objectively separating myself from this Indigenous identity research as my heart is implicated in discovering my own Indigeneity. First and foremost, I hope to honour relationships central to Anishinabek worldviews, by beginning with a self-location (Cote-Meek, 2014). I am a member of Opaskwayak Cree Nation from The Pas, Manitoba (Treaty 5 Territory) with Scots Métis roots from Cumberland House, Saskatchewan. I was born and raised by a Cree-Métis father and an Indonesian mother on the unceded territories of northern Tkarón:to. My late grandparents, Mary and Murray McKenzie were residential school Survivors. After contracting tuberculosis at a young age, Murray moved from Cumberland House to be with his grandmother in The Pas where he was treated at Clearwater Lake Sanitorium. Murray and Mary McKenzie raised all seven of their children in The Pas, the youngest child was my father. My fraternal aunts and uncles went to Sacred Heart Day School. My father did his schooling at R.D. Parker Collegiate in Thompson, Manitoba, then moved to Toronto at 18 years old, where he met my mother and had two children. Due to cultural disruptions from colonialism, my family and I were deprived of our ways, our language, and our culture. In light of the recent public attention on the unmarked graves on residential school grounds, difficult conversations were had within my family. Our journey consists of reintegrating and reconnecting with our Indigenous roots through retracing our family history, recognizing our strengths, learning Indigenous knowledge, and participating in cultural practices. Through this restoration and reclamation process, we have been able to move forward shoulder-to-shoulder one step at a time. We allowed ourselves to look back and recognize the trauma while simultaneously taking back what was ours— our

Indigenous identity. I have pursued clinical-developmental psychology at York University in hopes of supporting the healthy development of Indigenous children, youth, and young adults in rural and urban settings. I have been supported by my supervisors, Drs. Debra Pepler and Nicole Muir (Métis), as well as Elders, Traditional Counsellors, and other Indigenous students and scholars throughout my graduate education.

Lived Experiences of First Nations Girls: Exploring the Developmental Processes of Identity Formation through Narrative Interviews

> The issue of developing one's sense of identity, one's sense of connection to family, one's sense of connection to community, one's sense of connection to creation is reinforced on a daily basis throughout the life of that child. So, identity is very, very important. We cannot take it for granted.
>
> —The Honourable Murray Sinclair, *Indigenous Voices on Indigenous Identity*.[1]

Adolescents wrestle with the question 'Who am I?' to make meaning of themselves and their lives (Kroger, 2007). Adolescents work to weave the threads that connect their past, present and future to foster a sense of identity (Chandler et al., 2003). There is an increased recognition in literature on the importance of cultural identity for Indigenous youth development (e.g., Fatima et al., 2022). The Indigenous population represents approximately 5% of the population in Canada, and First Nations Peoples account for over half of this Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2022). The Indigenous[2] youth population is rapidly increasing. Indigenous youth aged 15-24 make up 17% of the Indigenous population compared to 12% of non-Indigenous peoples (Statistics Canada, 2021). Approximately half of the First Nations population are under the age of 30 (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2018). Despite the increasing Indigenous youth population and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Calls for Justice to have meaningful access to culture for identity

[1] Quote is from Murray Sinclair, Anishinaabe Judge, sourced from First Nations University of Canada and National Indigenous University Senior Leaders' Association (2022, p.7).

[2] In this paper, I refer to the term *Indigenous* as those who are original inhabitants of the land. In Canada, the term Indigenous refers to First Nations, Inuit, and Metis (FNIM) Peoples (Statistics Canada, 2011). In the past, the term Aboriginal was used to refer to Indigenous people. As such, I use the term Aboriginal when quoting past literature and the title of the original project that I used for this secondary analysis.

restoration (MMIWG, 2019), there is a dearth of research that explores First Nations youth, and specifically girls' processes of identity formation.

Consistent with Indigenous ways of knowing, I have adopted a relational-developmental perspective to provide context in telling a story of both colonialism and of strength. According to Forest, a Métis researcher, "Colonization in what has become Canada was the process through which Indigenous Peoples were dispossessed, and settler colonialism is the result of ongoing occupation since that time" (2021, para. 2). The ongoing and cascading impacts of 500 years of colonialism have challenged and continue to challenge First Nations girls' identity development through attempts to assimilate and civilize them into the European way of life severing relationships to land, culture, and community through violence (Kirmayer et al., 2000; Cardinal & Pepler, 2021). Colonialism interrupts cultural knowledge transmission that would otherwise carry messages of strong identity from community and family members to First Nations girls (Friskie, 2020). In Canada, communities have voiced alarm over the high number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls also known as, "Stolen Sisters" for decades (MMIWG, 2019). Indigenous women and girls are overrepresented in violence victimization in Canada, with 16% of known female victims of homicide and 11.3% of female missing victims being Indigenous (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2014; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2015). The identity crisis rooted in a cultural genocide is directly related to the epidemic of stolen sisters by family separation, colonial policies, and a dearth of culturally appropriate services that support healing and justice (MMIWG, 2019).

In response to the generations of colonialism, Indigenous women and girls are seeking to reclaim their Indigenous identity through a reconnection to power, place, and culture (MMIWG, 2019). Therefore, it is imperative to listen to the Indigenous girls' challenges of understanding

themselves and their way forward by acknowledging the broad colonial structures that hinder this critical development (Atkinson et al., 2014). In this study, I explored the developmental processes of identity formation among First Nations (Anishinaabe) girls using secondary data (interviews) from the "Talking Back: Aboriginal Girls Telling Their Stories" (hereafter known as the *Talking Back project*). I used a qualitative thematic approach to generate common themes of identity development processes arising from the voices of Anishinaabe adolescent girls aged 12 to 18 years, who lived in Thunder Bay and the Indigenous communities north of Thunder Bay.

Indigenous Perspectives on Meaning Making

The importance of identity is reflected in the way Indigenous peoples begin conversations (Joseph, 2018). Often, Indigenous peoples ask, 'Where do you come from?' to introduce themselves in a conversation by identifying with their (spirit) name, doodem clan, territory, nation, and/or ancestor lineage (Joseph, 2018). The importance of identity is also reflected in storytelling, which is central to Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing (Friskie, 2020). For millennia, teachings in the form of stories have guided Indigenous peoples to deepen their understanding of themselves and how they relate to the world (Makokis et al., 2020). Indigenous communities rely on storytelling to pass on teachings from ancestors about oral history, values, beliefs, truths, and ways of life (Archibald, 1997). Storytelling can also take the form of dance, song, visual arts, and ceremony (Friskie, 2020). Stories are relational processes that honour the responsibilities of both the storyteller and the story-listener in spiritual reciprocity (Lewis, 2006; Makokis et al, 2020). Stories that are repeatedly heard can carry various meanings depending on listener's life experiences or life stages (Makokis et al., 2020). The importance of making meaning for oneself is revealed by the Anishinaabe[3] value system. The Anishinaabe Seven

[3] Anishinaabe is a group of First Nations people that reside throughout the Great Lakes region (Hale, 2020).

Grandfather Teachings are seven truths or moral principles that have been passed down orally through generations for thousands of years to guide people towards living a good life or *Minobimaadiziwin* (Rheault, 1999; Benton-Banai, 2010). Grandmothers take on central roles to preserve values for the next generation, underscoring their special relationship with children and youth (Archibald, 2018); "Female Elders, also known as Grandmothers, carry the childrearing bundle for the people" (Dorion, 2010, p. 7).

For some Indigenous groups, the development of identity is understood to be a lifelong process beginning at birth (Palmater, 2011). There are cultural teachings that involve ceremonies to celebrate developmental milestones of life by recognizing the stage of becoming to instill children's growing recognition of who they are, as well as their strengths (e.g., spiritual naming ceremony, rites of passage berry ceremony for celebrating girls coming into womanhood) (Makokis et al., 2020; Wabie, 2019). According to Anishinaabe Elder, Pitawanakwat (2006), youth are at a wandering and wondering stage of a constant "searching for something and never finding it" as they have surpassed their childhood stage but are not yet an adult (Pitawanakwat, 2006, n.p.). Youths are searching to satiate their need for protection, nurturance, and guidance (Pitawanakwat, 2006). When one's spirit is properly nurtured, individuals are able to access and tap into their intuition to warn and protect themselves when danger arises (Pitawanakwat, 2006). Their spirits will serve as a guide, and will alert them if necessary by sending a message like, " 'No, don't go there. Go this way instead' " (Pitawanakwat, 2006, n.p.). Pitawanakwat (2006) warns that when youths' spirits are not properly nurtured, youth will find themselves in dangers and distractions stampeding their wandering and wondering stage in search for their true selves. Identity provides a sense of belonging and strength that enables Indigenous peoples to thrive and survive through unveiling their truth and life purpose (Palmater, 2011; Pitawanakwat, 2006).

Although making meaning of oneself is a lifelong learning process, youths are at a critical developmental stage on their path to self-discovery (Best Start Resource Centre, 2010).

Since time immemorial, Indigenous peoples have had their own ways of cultivating their sense of who they are (Palmater, 2011). Elder Bill Montour of Six Nations of the Grand River shared that Indigenous peoples relied on their own parenting practices, matriarchal, patriarchal, clan, and kinship systems to espouse a strong sense of identity for children (Palmater, 2011). Indigenous women carried the responsibility of sustaining cultural continuity to pass it along to younger generations, as such they were cherished for their active roles in making decisions for the benefit of the community (FemNorthNet, 2016). First Nations women and girls were deeply honoured, respected, and regarded as sacred beings (FemNorthNet, 2016). In Anishinaabe culture, the Strawberry or Berry Fast, is a rite of passage ceremony for adolescent girls that have their first *moon time* (onset of menarche) (Wabie, 2011). In the Berry Fast, girls spend time with women role models from their families and communities such as, aunties, grandmothers, and Elders for one year (The Kwek Society, n.d.). The girls receive teachings on womanhood, self-respect, and healthy relationships and learn about women's special role as life-givers and protectors (The Kwek Society, n.d.). Girls are also encouraged to reflect and recognize their own strength and sacredness (The Kwek Society, n.d.). At the end of the fast, a coming-out ceremony reintroduces the girls as young women to their community in a celebration (The Kwek Society, n.d.). Revitalizing, preserving, and strengthening girls' identity through means of cultural continuity are main goals for many Anishinaabe communities (Berry, 1999; Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., 2018).

Conceptual Framework

To lay the foundation of this research, I used a developmental-relational perspective that

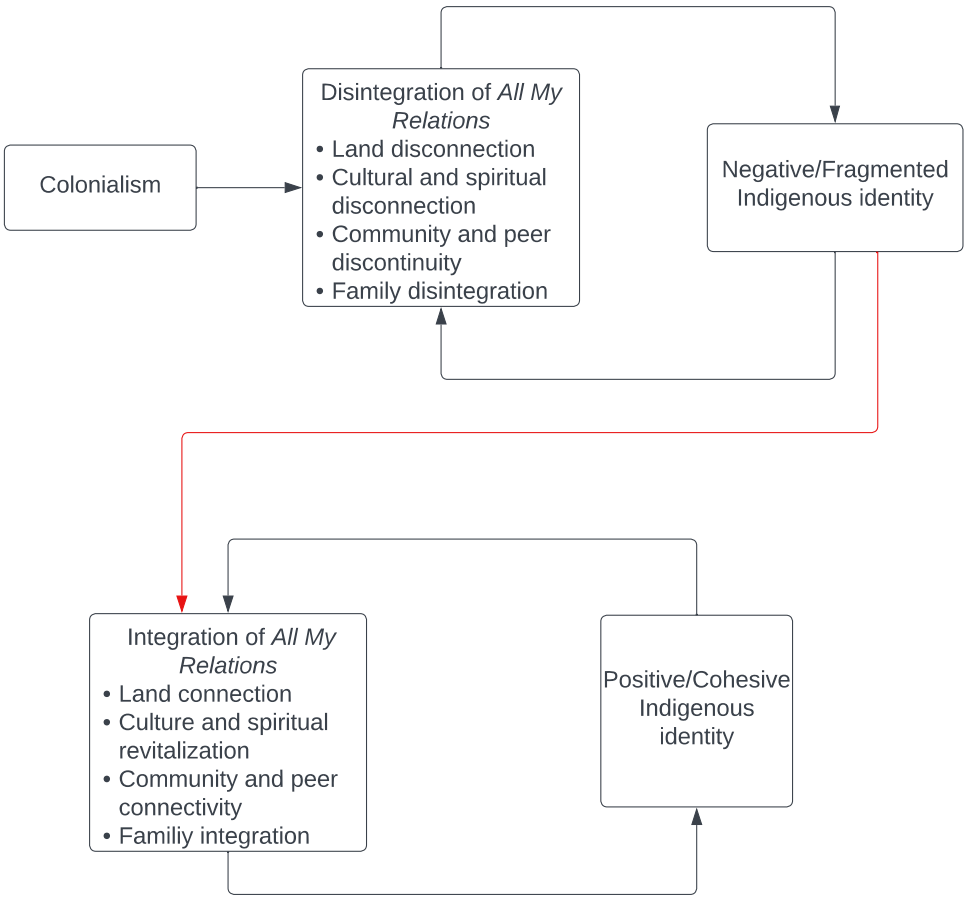
places colonial harms at the forefront of identity formation disruption. Cardinal and Pepler (2021) proposed a holistic framework that integrates relational determinants to promote flourishing and thriving for Indigenous communities as they move from a cycle of violence (colonialism) to the circle of wellness. The foundation of their model was derived from the truth and wisdom shared by Indigenous communities across Canada (See Appendix A for Cardinal and Pepler's *Community Journey of Change through Relational Determinants of Health* model). This model depicts a pathway that communities have used in their journeys to strengthen and restore *All My Relations* to land at a place of wellness. The term, *All My Relations* was described by Wagamese (2016), in his book, *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations*:

> It points to the truth that we are all related, we are all connected, we all belong to each other. The most important word is "all." Not just those who look like me, sing like me, dance like me, speak like me, pray like me, or behave like me. ALL my relations. That means every person, just as it means every rock, mineral, blade of grass, and creature. We live because everything else does. (p. 36).

The model was based on the understanding that thriving individual and community health depends on healthy relational environments. I adapted Cardinal and Pepler's (2021) model to illustrate a theoretical conceptualization of a fragmented (negative) and cohesive (positive) Indigenous identity that informed this research.

Figure 1

The Relational Determinants of Indigenous Identity Development Model



The conceptual framework that guides this research is entitled, *The Relational Determinants of Indigenous Identity Development Model* (See Figure 1). Colonialism refers to the active processes that continue to perpetuate identity disruption (Maracle, 2021). It interrupts the processes of making meaning of oneself in relationship to the world (Maracle, 2021). The arrow pointing from the *Disintegration of All My Relations* towards *Negative/ Fragmented Identity* represents how colonialism had disintegrated and continues to disintegrate *All My*

Relations through cultural disruption, land and spiritual disconnection, community discontinuity, and familial disintegration, leading to a negative/fragmented Indigenous identity (Cardinal & Pepler, 2021). An absence of integral, culturally attuned supports sidetrack Indigenous identity development for girls (Maracle, 2021). A negative/fragmented identity may be expressed through Indigenous identity denial, confusion, suppression, and loss, and may involve an internalization of negative (gendered) stereotypes rooted in colonialism (Bourassa et al., 2004). Notably, the *Disintegration of All My Relations* and *Negative/Fragmented Identity* processes have bidirectional influences. The arrow pointing from *Negative/Fragmented Identity* towards *Disintegration of All My Relations* illustrates that negative/fragmented Indigenous identity contributes to fractured or dispersed relationships with integral supports as a result of colonialism (Maracle, 2021; Kirmayer et al., 2000; see Cardinal & Pepler, 2021).

A *Reintegration of All My Relations* should also be recognized as an active process underlying a pathway to identity development (Maracle, 2021; Chandler, 2013). These processes were described by Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017):

> Biiskabiyang—the process of returning to ourselves, a reengagement with the things we have left behind, a reemergence, an unfolding from the inside out—is a concept, an individual and collective process of decolonization and resurgence. To me, it is the embodied processes as freedom. It is a flight out of the structure of settler colonialism and into the processes and relationships of freedom and self-determination encoded and practiced within Nishnaabewin or grounded normativity (p. 17).

The process of emergence for Indigenous youth may involve (re)centering, (re)connecting, (re)vitalizing meaningful relationships with the land, culture and spirituality, community, and family, constructing a positive/integrated sense of identity (Cardinal & Pepler,

2021). In the process of restoring these critical cultural strengths, Indigenous identities are enhanced (depicted by the arrow pointing from *Reintegration of All My Relations* to *Integrated Identity*) and/or reaffirmed (depicted by the arrow pointing from *Positive/Integrated Identity* to *All My Relations*) (Maracle, 2021; Cardinal & Pepler, 2021). To inform my research, I used *The Relational Determinants of Indigenous Identity Development Model* (Figure 1), which is grounded in relational-developmental perspective, adapted from Cardinal and Pepler's (2021) model.

Colonialism: Impact on Indigenous Girls' Identity

Indigenous peoples of Canada have experienced cascading colonial harms that interrupt identity development stretching back 500 years of European colonization (Cardinal & Pepler, 2021). Indigenous peoples' sense of identity has been continually challenged and threatened by the government goal of assimilation (Palmater, 2011). The deliberate attempt to "civilize" Indigenous peoples through the denial of land, resources, and cultural practices has been detrimental to the identity of whole communities, especially for women and girls (Boksa et al., 2015; Truth and Reconciliation of Canada [TRC], 2015).

The Indian Act, created in 1876, is contrary to the sacredness that women carry in being life-givers, sharers of cultural knowledge, and supporters of wellbeing and sustenance of their community (Weaver, 2009; Government of Canada, 2018; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2012). The government legally adjudicates who is or is not Indigenous based on racial purity or "blood quantum rules*"* to determine authenticity under the Indian Act (Government of Canada, 2018; Harris et al., 2013). The Indian Act also lumps the diverse groups of Indigenous peoples into one derogatory label, "Indian*"* (Palmater, 2011). The Indian Act discriminated against Indigenous women, their children, and successive generations in obtaining

Indian Status to be legally recognized as Indigenous (Palmater, 2011). In the past, Indigenous women lost their Indigenous recognition by marrying a non-status man (Government of Canada, 2018). As such, they were banished from their reserves, denied their band council leadership roles, and treaty obligations (Weaver, 2009; FemNorthNet, 2016). They were displaced from their culture, family, and community leading to heightened susceptibility to violence and poverty (Keeptwo, 2021; Palmater, 2011). Although there have been revisions to the Indian Act through acts of resistance, many women did not re-gain status which eroded their sense of belonging and identity, which has continued for decades (FemNorthNet, 2016).

The Indian Act also included the assimilation policy of residential schools that remained in effect for over 150 years (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, n.d.). Residential schools represented another wave of government control on identity through a detachment of Indigenous girls from their culture, families, and communities (TRC, 2015). Residential schools were government-funded day or boarding schools run by Christian churches (TRC, 2015). In Canada, there were over 130 residential schools enrolling approximately 150,000 Indigenous children (Miller, 2012). Canada placed Indigenous children in residential schools, not for advancing their education, but to eradicate their culture and identity (TRC, 2015). This intent was conspicuously revealed by Duncan Campbell Scott (1920), the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs who enforced compulsory schooling for Indigenous children: “Our objective is to continue until there is not an Indian that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department” (n.p.). Although the first federally authorized residential school began in 1883, the groundwork leading up to its development can be traced back to the 1600s (TRC, 2015). In its beginnings, the government was unsuccessful in these day schools as children ran away to be with their families and community, who provided cultural

support and connection, leading to school closure (TRC, 2015). Consequently, the government made more aggressive attempts to solve the "Indian problem" including family separation through the development of boarding schools, and mandatory enrollment (TRC, 2015). As a result, girls were forcibly removed from their lands and their parents and communities, which interrupted access to cultural knowledge and practices gathered from their home communities and families (TRC, 2015). Without their integral support systems, Indigenous girls were left to fend for themselves as they were forbidden to practice their culture or speak their Indigenous languages (Methot, 2019). In addition to the harms of separation from their families, residential schools modelled unhealthy "parenting" through the replacement of nurturance and safety with abuse and shame of being Indigenous (Methot, 2019). This destructive context contributed to former students' fragility in forming healthy attachments with their own children and other interpersonal relationships, perpetuating intergenerational trauma and cultural loss (Methot, 2019).

After the implementation of residential schools, the Sixties Scoop placed an estimated 20,000 Indigenous infants and children into foster care in the 1960s (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation [NCTR, 2021]). These children were "scooped" or removed from their land, communities, and families and placed into predominately Euro-Canadian families often without consent from families or bands (NCTR, 2021; Sinclair & Dainard, 2016; Johnston, 1983). The Sixties Scoop stifled the development of a strong and healthy sense of identity for adoptees through a sense of identity loss leading to the search for belonging (Sinclair, 2007). Currently, there are three times more First Nations children in child welfare than there were at the height of residential schools in Canada (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, n.d.). The Indian Act, residential school, and the Sixties Scoop are relatively widely recognized examples of

colonial harm; however, they represent only a fraction of the 15 layers of harm from colonialism inflicted on Indigenous peoples over the past 500 years in Canada (Cardinal & Pepler, 2021). The cascading colonial harms have created and continue to create vulnerable contexts for Indigenous girls in identity formation (Cardinal & Pepler, 2021).

Western Paradigms of Identity Development

To date, Erikson's work on identity theory is the most referenced in identity research and implicated in contemporary theories (McLean & Syed, 2015; Treiber & Booysen, 2021). Erikson (1950, 1968) conceptualized identity a sense of sameness or continuity across time providing a sense of direction for the future (Pasupathi, 2014; McLean et al., 2016). Erikson (1950) identified the identity versus role confusion stage being a central developmental task during adolescence (Kroger, 2007; Erikson, 1950, Erikson, 1968). At this stage, youth begin to explore their identity by experimenting with relational roles, vocational goals, and values. Through exploration, youth were able to identify goals and values that were most important to them (Erikson, 1968). Building on Erikson's identity theory, the developmental psychologist Marcia (1966;1980) conceptualized four identity formation categories for adolescents based on the degree and intersection of commitment and exploration. Notably, Marcia's (1966) identity status theory was developed from interviews with primarily college males and may not be applicable to the process of female and Indigenous identity formation.

Like Erikson (1968), many scholars contended that identity is an ongoing and everchanging developmental process to make meaning of oneself and others (Nagel, 1994; Harris et al., 2013). To have identity is to generate a narrative that is constantly revisited and refined in a cohesive, meaningful way as one's story unravels with time (Stevenson, 2006; Nagel, 1994). In the same vein, a sense of distinctiveness, that is, perceiving oneself as unique

from others shapes identity formation (e.g., Breakwell, 2021; Vignoles et al., 2006). Generally, people from individualistic cultures construe themselves as independent and tend to value individualistic traits and characteristics (Smith, 2011). In contrast, people from collectivistic cultures tend to identify themselves with interdependent descriptors reflecting relatedness and connection (Smith, 2011). The extant research tends to reflect this dichotomy and leans either on individual or on social theories of identity (Vignoles, 2017). There is gap in identity formation theory that fails to consider and integrate the dynamic developmental and relational interplay among various spheres of influence in generating a more holistic conceptualization of identity formation (Vignoles, 2017). Additionally in theory and research, there is little consideration of the intergenerational historical impacts that shape identity formation including colonization (land dislocation), colonialism (subsequent cultural genocide), and Indigenous identity formation (Vignoles, 2017).

In the literature, identity has been associated with positive psychosocial functioning and wellbeing (Meca et al., 2023). Adolescents with a synthesized and coherent understanding of who they are were likely to experience positive interpersonal relationships with family and others (Crocetti et al., 2008; Doumen et al., 2012), have low levels of internalizing symptoms, such as depressive and anxiety symptoms (Bogaerts et al., 2021; Crocetti et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2015) and low levels of externalizing problems including rule-breaking and aggressive behaviour (Meca et al., 2017; Crocetti et al., 2014; Schwartz et al., 2015). In contrast, identity confusion is linked to a wide range of internalizing and externalizing challenges including emotional dysregulation (Neacsiu et al., 2015), depressive and anxiety symptoms (Bogaerts et al., 2021; Crocetti et al., 2009), low self-esteem (Meca et al., 2017), substance use (Schwartz et al., 2008), and delinquency (Meeus et al., 2012). In summary, adolescents who developed a

coherent and clear sense of identity tended to experience fewer behavioural and adjustment challenges than those who did not (Sharma & Chandiramani, 2021).

Indigenous Identity Research

> Traditions tie us not only to our ancestors, but to friends, families, and communities in the present. This connection, which helps form our sense of identity, can then be passed on to future generations, thereby completing the circle of relations necessary to maintain culture (Palmater, 2011, p. 189).

Although there are numerous identity formation theories offered by Western scholars, there is a dearth of theories on the development of Indigenous identity. Harris and colleagues (2013) contended that Indigenous identity involves (re)claiming and resisting attributions arising from interaction with dynamic historical, cultural, and social contexts. Because the self is related to the continuous and shifting flow of these dynamic relationships, Indigenous identity is understood as emergent and everchanging throughout life (Harris et al., 2013). An Indigenous traditional counsellor, Nancy Louit-Gonzalez shared that identity consists of where one is from, where one is at, and where one is going (Maya Ki'che, personal communication, October 28, 2023).

There is some research on Indigenous identity. In their article, "Giibinenimidizomin: Owning Ourselves—Critical Incidents in the Attainment of Aboriginal Identity," Indigenous researchers Goodwill and McCormick (2012) described processes of Indigenous identity for adults. Twelve Indigenous adults from British Columbia were interviewed on the components that promoted or hindered their Indigenous identity development. There were 12 themes of processes that helped and three themes of processes that hindered identity development. The helping processes that promoted Indigenous identity development were relational and can be

summarized into three groups: family, community, and cultural influences. Conversely, factors that hindered Indigenous identity development had elements of disconnection to culture and community, and negative misrepresentations about themselves or their people/community.

In a scoping review of 44 articles, Heid and colleagues (2022) identified key components that supported or hindered Indigenous youths' wellness. Similar to research on Indigenous adults' identity development (e.g., Goodwill & McCormick, 2012), one of the three stressors detracting an Indigenous youth from wellness was the loss of cultural identity. Conversely, cultural pride and future orientation were two of the mechanisms that enabled youths' resilience. Similarly, Snowshoe and colleagues (2016) found that a strong Indigenous identity was linked to resiliency mechanisms and wellness. Their Cultural Connectedness Scale (CSC) included a total of three dimensions of identity, tradition, and spirituality which "aid[s] in the prediction of positive health outcomes" (Snowshoe et al., 2016, p. 249). In a paper entitled, "The Impact of Cultural Identity on Future Orientations among First Nations Youth," Klassen (2014) noted that higher scores on Indigenous cultural identity were associated with higher optimism. Overall, research indicates that cultural identity is integral to Indigenous youths' resilience and wellness.

Chandler and Lalonde (2003) studied the wellbeing of Indigenous youth and the importance of cultural cohesion to reduce suicide. Their collaborative work revealed that having a sense of self-continuity in stringing together one's past, present, and anticipated future was a protective mechanism against suicidal risk (Chandler et al., 2003). They found diverse prevalence rates of suicide in nearly 200 Indigenous communities in British Columbia that were linked to markers of cultural continuity. The six markers of cultural continuity included land claims, self-government, education, police and fire protection services, health services, and cultural facilities. A consistent trend was revealed across all the communities. The more cultural

markers that a community had, the lower the youth suicide prevalence rates were. Every community with all six markers, reported no instances of youth suicides. In contrast, communities that lacked cultural markers had up to 100 times the suicide rates than the national average in Canada (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998). Strengthening identity development and cultural continuity in particular, may buffer the risk for Indigenous youth suicide (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Chandler et al., 2003). Nonetheless, a cross-sectional study cannot determine causality (Kirmayer et al., 2007). Other possible mechanisms that were not examined include a lack of socio-economic risk factors, more job opportunities for youth, and collective self-efficacy in communities as protective mediating factors in suicide risk (Kirmayer et al., 2007). Another criticism is that not all six markers were pertinent to cultural continuity for example, institutions such as formal school systems are not related to sustainability of culture (Kirmayer et al., 2007). A more comprehensive analysis is needed to consider colonial history and the socio-relational dynamics of communities to explore mediating factors in the prevalence of suicide rates (Mignone & O'Neil, 2005).

There is some research, although limited, that pertains to the identity formation of Indigenous women and girls specifically. In an article titled, "Reclaiming my Indigenous Identity and Emerging Warrior: An Autoethnography," the identity journey of an Indigenous women, Natalie St-Denis, was described (St-Denis & Walsh, 2016). The six phases that emerged on her path were the *awakening* phase of understanding herself as an Indigenous woman; the *exploring* phase of participating in Indigenous ceremony; the *Indigenize* phase of implementing Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing; the *reclaiming* phase of integrating both Indigenous and Western perspectives into one's understanding of the world; the *belonging* phase of community connection; and lastly, the *emerging warrior* stage of taking a stand towards decolonization.

Kim Anderson (2000), a Cree and Métis researcher, also described the processes of identity development in her book, "A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood." Anderson (2000) interviewed 40 Indigenous adult women across Canada to explore how women preserve their strength and power amidst experiences of colonialism. The women who participated in the interviews were from a range of Indigenous groups such as Olanagan, Inuit, Ojibway, Mi'kmaw, Mohawk, Sioux, Métis, and Onya:ta'ka. Anderson conceptualized identity formation as processes of resistance, reclaiming, constructing, and acting. The process of *resistance* involved construing who one is not through resisting negative representations about the self. The *reclamation* component referred to reclaiming Indigenous roots. The *construction* process involved building a positive identity through cultural engagement. Finally, the *acting* process entailed acting on one's identity by fulfilling responsibilities that contribute to the wellbeing of the community. To my knowledge, there is only one study that examined the identity of Indigenous adolescent girls (Krieg, 2016). Krieg (2016) used photovoice to explore the lived experiences of six urban Indigenous girls ages 16 to 18 in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. The girls were asked to take pictures of what it means to be an Indigenous girl. Common themes that surfaced from these pictures were the recognition of the detrimental loss of identity, and the need for resurgence to connect with cultural knowledge and roots. Taken together, the processes of identity development for Indigenous women and girls appeared to involve leaving behind or resisting strands that are not congruent with self and then weaving together strands that support their understanding of who they are. Moreover, the final stage of identity seemed to involve empowerment by being teachers or role models for their community.

Consistent with a developmental lens, Chandler and colleagues (2013) contended that Indigenous identity research should be geared towards identity processes as opposed to content. This approach advances the understanding of processes that preserve Indigenous identity amidst colonial structures and harms (Chandler et al., 2013). Therefore, the focus of my research is on the processes of Indigenous adolescent girls' developmental search in discovering their identity as they transition to womanhood (Erikson, 1968; Pitawanakwat, 2006).

The Current Study

The purpose of this study was to examine processes that Anishinaabe girls experience on their pathway towards identity development. I explored Anishinaabe girls' lived experiences by carefully listening to their lived experiences. I used secondary data (interviews) from Talking Back project developed by Drs. Kirsten Madsen, Debra Pepler, and Susan Dion. Notably, the intent of this research *was not* to determine what identities should be attained, nor was it to determine identity processes that are representative of all Anishinaabe girls. It was my hope that this exploratory research will fill the gap on the processes of First Nations adolescent girls' identity development by beginning to sketch pathways that girls may follow to discover where they are from, where they are at, and where they are going (Nancy Louit-Gonzalez, Maya Ki'che, personal communication, October 28, 2023).

For this study, the overarching research question was: 'What are the developmental and relational processes that shape identity development for Indigenous adolescent girls?' To provide a response to the research question, I defined the term, *identity*. Although there were many identity definitions offered in Western psychology, I placed more weight on Indigenous centered conceptualizations as this was a study about Indigenous girls. Therefore, I have used the following conceptualizations of identity:

1) an emergent and dynamic developmental process in a continuously evolving understanding of who one is (Harris et al., 2013);

2) an integrated narrative of one's life story of where one is from, where one is at, and where one is going (Stevenson, 2006; Nancy Louit-Gonzalez, Maya Ki'che, personal communication, October 28, 2023); and

3) is wholistically constructed from social, historical, and cultural relationships (Harris et al., 2013; Palmater, 2011).

Method

Truth Gathering Process

For the current study, I used secondary data of transcribed interviews from the *Talking Back* project. The Talking Back project was a study developed by Drs. Kristen Madsen, Debra Pepler, and Susan Dion in collaboration with Dilico Anishinabek Family Care (Dilico), an Indigenous child protection agency, to understand Indigenous adolescent girls' lived experiences associated with aggressive behaviour. Dilico (2021) serves many Indigenous communities in Thunder Bay and the surrounding areas in Northern Ontario. Dilico offers wrap around support for children, adults, families, and communities including child welfare, health and wellness services, and cultural programs (Dilico, 2021). It is committed to providing children with the opportunity to know where they come from, recognize their need for belonging, and strengthen Indigenous cultural knowledge through Elders teachings (Dilico, 2017).

The Talking Back project, which ran from 2003 to 2006, was a partnership study that involved clinicians, community members, and Anishinaabe girls interviewed. Three researchers, Drs. Kristen Madsen, Debra Pepler, and Susan Dion, together with four community-based members of Dilico staff, developed the project to understand Indigenous adolescent girls' lived

experiences of aggressive behaviour. Grounded in decolonizing, feminist and critical methodologies, research assistants interviewed 40 First Nations (Anishinaabe) girls. All the girls provided assent and had parental consent to participate in the interviews. The interview questions were designed to explore girls' own perceptions of their lives and the concerns that Dilico had for their healthy development and relationships. The semi-structured interviews comprised 56 questions across four areas: Self, School, People in your Life, and Home (see Appendix B for the interview protocol and full questionnaire). These questions were co-created with women from the community. The interview process entailed listening to girls' voices as they spoke about contributions to self-representations (Dion, 2013). The interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed.

Participants

I conducted secondary data analysis of a total of 16 Anishinaabe girls' interviews from the Talking Back project. The term Anishinaabe refers to a group of First Nations people who reside throughout the Great Lakes region (Hale, 2020). Anishinaabeg (plural form of Anishinaabe) consists of peoples identifying as Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Chippewa, Odawa, Potawatomi, Algonquin, Saulteaux, Nipissing, and Mississauga First Nations (Hale, 2020). The word Anishinaabe translates to *"*beings made out of nothing,*"* which has meaning within the Ojibway creation story (Johnston, 1976, p. 15). The girls aged 12 to 18 were recruited from Thunder Bay and surrounding communities. According to "Thunder Bay Our Health Counts: An inclusive community-driven health survey for Indigenous peoples in Thunder Bay" (Anishnawbe Mushkiki, 2020), there were up to 42,641 Indigenous individual aged 15 years or older, 98% of whom were First Nations. The population was much younger than the general Thunder Bay population with 17% aged 15-24 years old and 31% aged 25-34 (Anishnawbe Mushkiki, 2020).

From the Talking Back project, I was provided with 26 transcribed interviews. Eight of these 26 Anishinaabe girls had been referred to Dilico for mental health support for a range of problems including aggressive behaviours and internalizing symptoms. The remaining 18 girls were recruited from First Nations communities in the Dilico catchment area (Thunder Bay and surrounding communities). (See Appendix C for a map of Dilico locations). I included all eight girls who had been referred to Dilico services and to match the number of clinical girls, eight girls were randomly chosen from the community sample. A total of sixteen interviews were used for this secondary data analysis study.

Qualitative Analysis

The Anishinaabe Elder Basil Johnston (1976) noted "…it is not enough to listen to or to read or to understand the truths contained in stories; according to elders the truths must be lived out and become part of the being of a person" (p. 7). Lavallée, an Indigenous researcher explained that cultural teachings passed down through generations from ancestors cannot be observed, measured, or quantified (2009). Therefore, the method of qualitative analysis used in this study is consistent with Indigenous ways of knowing to make meaning of the self, others, and the world (Lavallée, 2009). I acknowledge the flexibility of thematic analysis to determine themes emerging from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With this flexibility, the researcher has an active role in generating and make meaning of relevant codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To minimize the possibility of misinterpretation and inaccuracy of what the girls were trying to express, I aimed to convey the girls' lived experiences in the stories in a literal and semantic manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, I used an inductive analysis, a data-driven approach to allow the voices to take root and formulate broader themes from the ground up (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this study, I used an inductive analysis for two reasons: 1) there is a

dearth of theories on Indigenous girls' identity formation, which is required for a deductive approach; and 2) to adopt a decolonizing approach with active listening that would prioritize girls' voices and empower them to tell their own stories without a preconceived coding frame.

I followed the guidelines for thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) in their article titled, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology". Although I followed the six phases, my analysis process was not linear. As Braun and Clarke indicated (2006), thematic analysis involves constructing and re-constructing codes and themes in a constant sifting across the data set and movement between phases to increase clarity and refinement. I referred to the term, *codes* to describe a single segment of meaningful data relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The codes are then synthesized to encapsulate units of analysis called *themes* (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme is what houses codes that "fit" under a particular theme. Codes that did not describe processes of identity were discarded from the analyses and codes that were relevant to this question were identified for further analysis for a potential theme. The conceptualization of identity adapted from Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and traditional counsellors aided in this process of producing codes. Beginning with step one and throughout the analysis, I wrote notes of what I perceived as relevant from the girls' voices, jotted down ideas, and possible webs of patterns. See Table 1 for description of the six steps from Braun and Clarke (2006) augmented by a side-by-side description of the specific steps that I followed for this study.

Table 1

Six Phases Adapted from Braun and Clarke's (2006) Guidelines on Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke Thematic Analysis Steps	Specific Adaptation Steps for the Present Study
1. Familiarizing yourself with the data *	• Read all transcripts at least three times to immerse in the data. • Made annotations (notes) of each potential "code" on NVivo.
2. Generating initial codes *	• From the annotations, initial codes were created. Initial codes were generated that were seemingly relevant to the study to prevent "missed" codes.
3. Searching for themes *	• Organized codes that "hang together". Discarded codes that are irrelevant upon further analysis and consultation. Developed initial subthemes and themes.
4. Reviewing themes *	• After review, themes were reorganized, reworked, coalesced, and collapsed where needed. Drew mind-maps that led to the development of the overarching themes. • Reread the entire data set to code any missed data.

5. Defining and naming themes *	• The naming of themes germane to answering the research question. Each theme tells part of the story on identity processes.
6. Producing the report	• Selected exemplary quotes that capture the subthemes and themes. Wrote a final analysis on findings.

Note. These thematic analysis steps shown on the left side of this table were taken from Braun and Clarke (2006). I adapted the steps listed on the right side of the table for the current study. *=Co-coded.

The annotations (notes), codes, and themes were generated manually and through a software coding program called NVivo (NVivo R1 2020). After the codes were generated on NVivo, I used post-it notes to write all the codes and stuck them onto Bristol boards (phases two to four). This aided in organizing the codes spatially to see patterns that were then incorporated into themes. The three coders involved in this study were Stephanie McKenzie (the author); Dr. Debra Pepler, Clinical-Developmental psychology professor; and Melissa Major, a graduate Clinical-Developmental Psychology student. I consulted Dr. Pepler on a weekly basis to generate codes, review the codes to land on a consensus (or not), collapse subthemes, and to identify which codes belonged and did not belong under a theme.

Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the Associate Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies of York University. The Tri-Council Ethics for Research with Indigenous Peoples (2014) and the Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP™) (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2014) were used as an ethical guide for this research. In this study, ethical issues from an

Indigenous perspective were deeply considered at every step of the research. Moreover, I recognize and honour the ethical standards that will continue after the completion of this study. The original research was co-created with a strong partnership with Dilico with concerted efforts to build trust and safety. As this research was made possible through this university-community partnership, it was essential to create space for collaboration. I have endeavoured to describe the research in a transparent, honest, and humble way.

Protecting the girls' confidentiality was a primary concern in this study. In the transcripts that I was provided, the girls' names had been removed from the transcripts and replaced with a number. As well, any identifying information from the interviews had been removed. As a co-created research project, I plan to share the aggregated results with the Talking Back project leaders and will include consultation with Dilico on further interpretation and knowledge mobilization. I recognize that the knowledge that the girls shared does not belong to me; therefore, I will have discussions with the research leaders and Dilico staff to support formal and community reports arising from the research. There will be a reciprocal benefit consistent with Indigenous culture (e.g., a brief report, infographic) to inform Dilico and its community.

Results

"I didn't really care if I'm being asked questions because I like to be asked questions for people to get to know me better or tell my story."

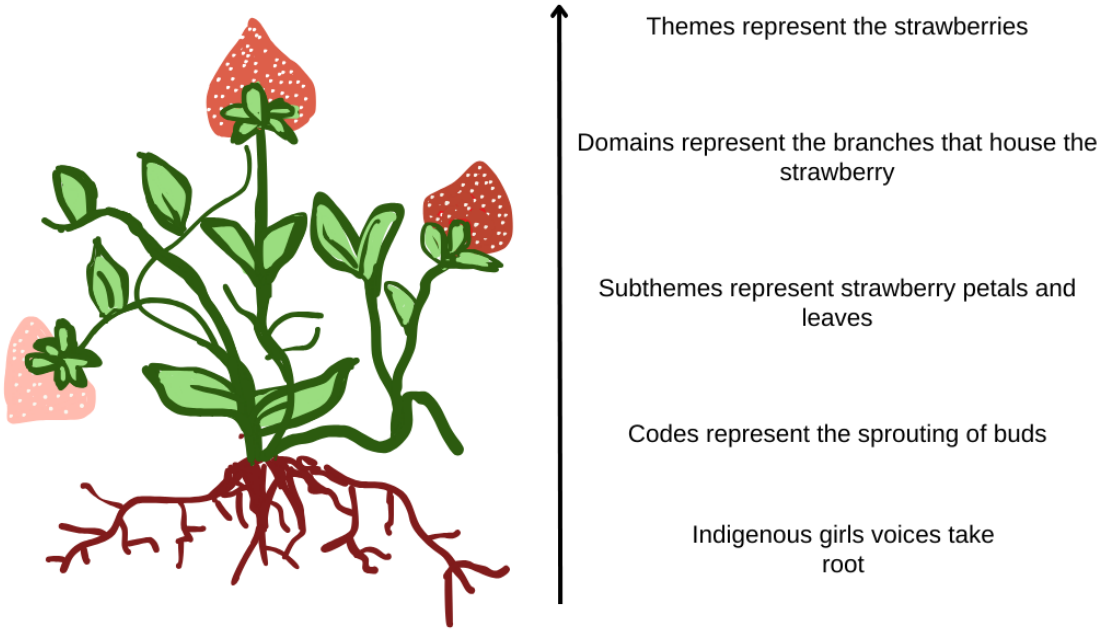
—Anishinaabe girl participant

This qualitative analysis of Indigenous girls' voices focused on describing the developmental and relational processes involved in identity development for Anishinaabe girls. A pathway to identity development was generated from the girls' conversations. They spoke about their experiences of Being, Becoming, and Envisioning. These staged processes were identified as the three overarching themes in the girls' interviews. A total of 1,118 coded comments related to identity development were captured. The number of codes were quantified and summarized in Appendix D, E, and F.

I used a bottom-up approach of letting the girls' stories take root in formulating codes and generating themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). From the girls' voices, I produced codes, from which, I produced subthemes. Then, I organized the subthemes into domains. For this study, domains refer to topic summaries of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Finally, from the domains, I generated overarching themes. To elucidate the steps and labels of categories in this inductive analysis, I used the analogy of a growing strawberry plant (See Figure 2).

Figure 2.

Strawberry Analogy: Labelling Categories in Inductive Thematic Analysis



Note: Strawberries, also known as, *heart berries*, are woman's medicine in many Indigenous cultures (Wabano, n.d.). In the strawberry harvesting month of June, there are annual feasts that welcome "heartfelt" relationships with one another (Wabano, n.d.). Strawberries reminds Anishinaabe young woman to "care for and sustain her people" and let go of judgement and differences (Wabano, n.d., n.p.).

Defining Being, Becoming, and Envisioning

All the girls provided comments that described the three overarching themes of Being, Becoming, and Envisioning and from these comments, I conceptualized their definitions. Being refers to who one is at the present moment. The stage of Being describes one's sense of self in their current development. Becoming was conceptualized as a process of understanding or piecing together who one is coming to be through learning, discovery, and emergence (adapted from Peters & Andersen, 2013; Harris et al., 2013). Becoming comprises learning about the self

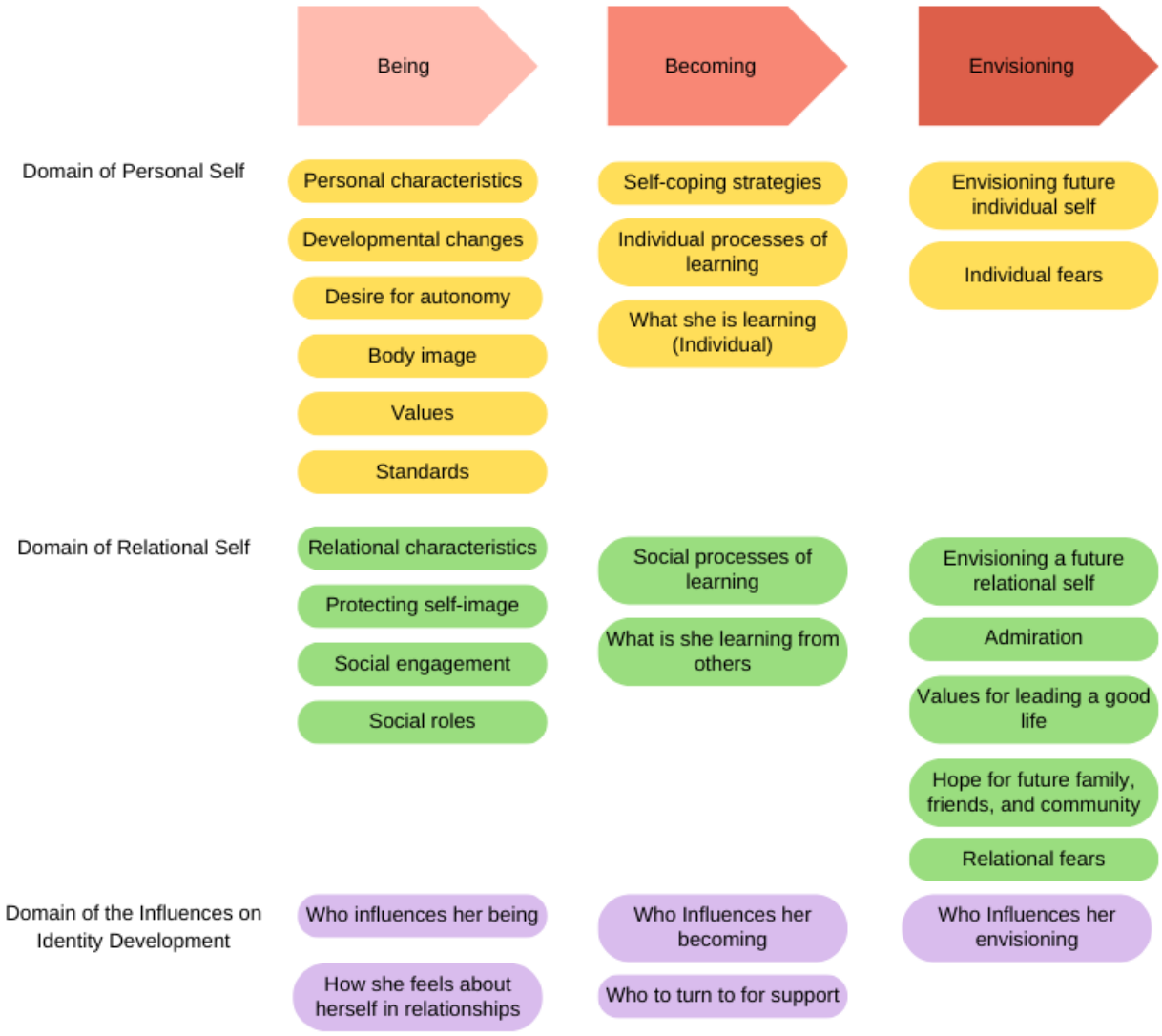
by exploring options and making choices, to see which decision resonates most with the self (adapted from Peters & Andersen, 2013). Lastly, Envisioning comprises one's hopes and dreams about a desired future (adapted from Battiste, 2000).

Conceptualizing Domains

There were three general domains related to each of these overarching themes on the processes of identity development: 1. Personal Self, 2. Relational Self, and 3. Influences on Identity Development. For this study, I conceptualized the Personal Self domain as characteristics that define who one is as a unique individual which consists of personal values and developmental positionality (adapted from Turner et al., 1994). I referred to the Relational Self domain as categories that define a person in regard to shared similarities with members of a particular group, culture, or place (adapted from McCubbin et al., 2013). In addition, I conceptualized the domain of the Influences on Identity Development as the interactions within relationships that shape the way girls' view, learn, or dream about themselves. By listening to the voices of 16 Anishinaabe girls, I offered descriptions of the three themes, and subthemes of identity development organized within the three domains. I generated three overarching themes with a total of 28 subthemes of identity development. Particularly, 12 subthemes comprised the theme of Being; seven subthemes comprised the Becoming theme; and lastly, eight subthemes comprised the Envisioning theme. See Figure 3 for an organized list of subthemes under the developmental processes of Being, Becoming, and Envisioning. Notably, there were domains or summaries of topics in each of the developmental processes labelled as Domain of Personal Self, Domain of Relational Self, and Domain of the Influences on Identity Development also illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3.

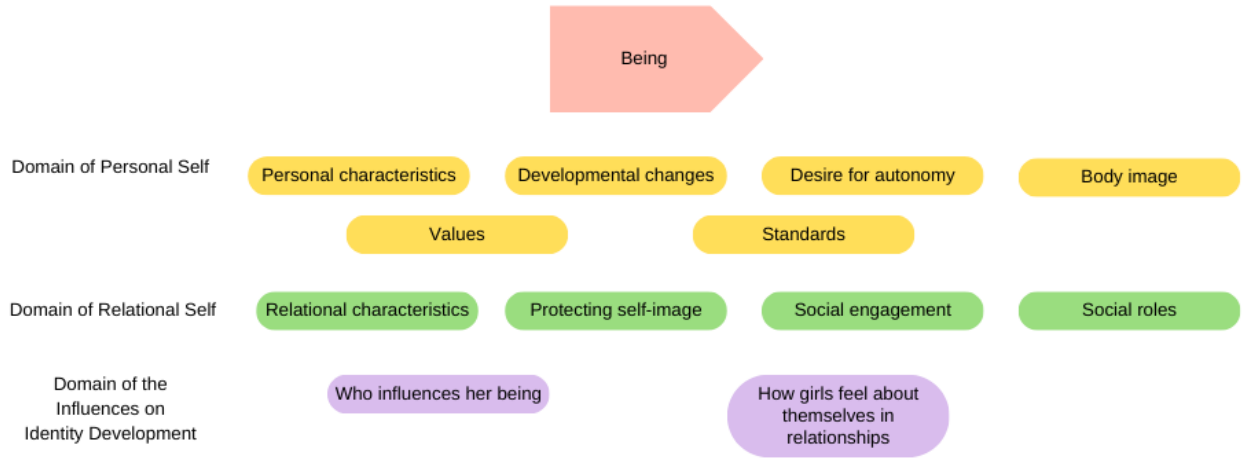
Themes, Domains, and Subthemes of Anishinaabe Girls' Identity Development



Theme 1: Being

Figure 4.

Anishinaabe Girls' Stage of Being and its Subsequent Domains and Subthemes



Domain of Personal Self

The process of Being was conceptualized as who one is at the present moment. There were 12 subthemes underlying the primary theme of Being. (See Appendix D for frequencies of codes, girls commented, and coded comments for the primary theme of Being). The Personal Self domain of Being comprised the following six subthemes: 1) Personal characteristics, 2) Developmental changes, 3) Desire for autonomy, 4) Body image, 5) Values, and 6) Standards. See Figure 4 for the primary theme of Being and its domains and subthemes.

Personal Characteristics. Eight girls identified *personal characteristics* about themselves. The girls conveyed both positive and negative self-descriptions. Eight girls described positive personal characteristics including funny, smart, and nice. Four girls described negative characteristics about themselves such as, weird, not smart, and stubborn.

Developmental Changes. In this subtheme, six girls described their growth by choosing new paths compared to their past decisions. When commenting about trying a new drug, one girl

responded with “I don’t usually take it. I’m not really in the experimenting phase of my life anymore.” Another girl noted, “I guess I could somewhat be a little bit of [a] bully in grade 8, but after I just didn’t think it was cool because I [saw] people get beat up for stupid reasons.” Other girls made new friendships after leaving a gang, as well as, quit drinking.

Desire for Autonomy. The third subtheme, *desire for autonomy*, was shared by six girls. For instance, one girl shared, “I’m old enough to do stuff on my own… I have the same curfew as my sister and she is younger than me and I think I can stay out a little later.” Another girl commented about wanting total freedom:

> Just to get up and [say], “I am going to go out” without having to tell anybody. Just go out and do my thing and stroll around 2 and go to sleep, get up, [and] do something. Come home and then go out. Like just [do] whatever I want to do…

Body Image. Five girls spoke about their *body image* concerns and wanting to present themselves in a desired way. Three of the girls wished their bodies were different while the remaining two reported feeling self-conscious. One girl remarked, “… I’m getting older so now you learn about your appearance and what people think about you.” Another girl remarked, “...if I go to school without taking a shower, I feel shy and I hide…If I don’t [shower], I would run home after school and take a shower.”

Values. The fifth subtheme under the Personal Self domain is *values,* which girls often described in relation to their families. Many girls identified specific meaningful others: mother, father, parents, brother, sister, cousin, grandparent(s), and general family. Some girls also discussed the importance of both nuclear and extended family members. For example, one girl mentioned “My grandparents are like my parents.” Girls also mentioned that they value their partners, friends, school, culture, nature, and general togetherness. An exemplary quote

describing how much one girl valued friendship is:

> When I heard that they were going out or whatever I went to my other friend, and I was like how can she do that, she knew I really liked him and now she's going out with him. But then after it was like who cares, I [am] not going to let a guy ruin a friendship that I have had for my whole life [when] I just known him for a couple of years.

Another girl expressed her value of togetherness, preferring to be in the company of other people:

> Kind of when I am alone with people. I don't necessarily have to talk to them, I just like watching them sometimes. I don't like being by myself…I don't like being alone… It just seems so cold and empty.

Culture was also identified as an important value. One girl noted that the best thing her family did for her was take her to powwows. When asked about what she enjoyed about it, she responded, "I like seeing other Aboriginals coming together..." Another girl expressed that she values her Indigenous heritage and spirituality despite clashing family beliefs:

> But the part that I don't like is because I have like a step mom and a step dad. Well, my real mom is [a] straight Christian when I was younger… They don't talk bad about her, but they just don't believe in all that. But I like my Native.

Standards. The sixth subtheme under the Personal Self domain is *standards*. Anishinaabe girls frequently referenced their personal standards, which they set for themselves, their relationships with actual or potential friends, and actual or potential partners. One girl mentioned her expectations for herself in not consuming alcohol:

> Some people say, "Oh, you're gonna end up like your parents…Why don't you go end up like your mom or your dad or step dad." And that would remind me and I proved them wrong. I try to prove them wrong. Like [I'm] not gonna do that, I'm not gonna drink.

Another indication of standards is when one girl expressed what qualities she looks for in a friend, "Someone that's easy to talk to…that's fun to be around, joke around, nice, honest, …caring." In regards to standards of a potential or actual partner, girls most indicated that they wanted a partner to be respectful, for example, "Somebody who is nice and respects me and others." Girls also wanted a partner who provides emotional support, "Somebody they can really really talk to, and they can understand, to get comfort from…He would comfort you and he would tell you it would be okay." Girls also indicated the importance of quality time together with a potential partner, "They like to spend a lot of time with me."

Domain of Relational Self

In this research, the Relational Self was conceptualized as social characteristics or categories that define a person in regards to shared similarities with members of a particular group, culture, or place (adapted from McCubbin et al., 2013). Subthemes that comprised Relational Self were: 1) Relational characteristics, 2) Protecting self-image, 3) Social engagement, and 4) Social roles.

Relational Characteristics. The girls described 12 *relational characteristics* that included both who one is and who one is not. For instance, one girl described herself as, "[I am] grumpy and sometimes only with my friends and happy when I am around my family sometimes." When the interviewer asked why she gets grumpy sometimes, and the participant replied, "when I don't get to sleep…when my mom does drink with my aunties and I see my cousins hurt all of the time, when my auntie is always [drunk], especially my cousin." Some girls

described themselves as what they are not: “not aggressive”, “not competitive”, “not defensive”, “not violent”, and “not self-centered.” Other examples of self-descriptions that girls identified with were “caring”, “helpful”, “perceptive”, “understanding”, “gentle”, “honest”, “trustful”, and “shy.”

Protecting Self-Image. Four girls mentioned protecting their *self-image* from others including family, parents, and grandparents. One reason for protecting self-image was not to worry their parents. One girl remarked:

> Well, I don’t really like crying to them [parents] because then they get all worried and concerned. Just giving them too much info. I just like to make them think that everything is all right and not to worry them.

Another reason for protecting self-image was to not draw attention to oneself, “I don’t like throwing my stuff around because it draws attractions. And I don’t want my parents coming downstairs, asking me what I am doing.” Similarly, another girl mentioned hiding aspects of herself from her family, “If something is wrong, I don’t tell them [family]…I just tell them what they want to hear.”

Social Engagement. Twelve girls shared positive or negative experiences of *social engagement*.[4] Social engagement was conceptualized as social connectivity or participating in social activities. Of the 12 girls, nine described positive social engagement with friends, family, and culture. The girls indicated that Indigenous peoples build and sustain friendships with other Indigenous peoples as a collective unit:

[4] There were two girls who shared experiences of both positive and negative social engagement.

> Mostly for us it's because we all grew up together on the reserve or [reserve name], so we all play together. And the Native kids from [other reserve name] because they all have family that live on either reserve.

Other friendship outings included walking around the reserve or go swimming with friends. In relation to cultural engagement, girls described making moccasins at school, praying in a sweat lodge, and attending powwows with family (e.g., "[I] just dance around [at a powwow], walk around, watch them drum").

Five girls mentioned negative social engagement including, negative involvement with others, and peer pressure. One girl mentioned:

> …Last year, when I saw this movie…Me and my friend started acting like them…They were stealing, cutting their wrists…I guess that I thought it was cool to do. Because this was how these other people in the movie are doing it.

Another girl was asked if she ever participated in something that she would not do alone. She replied:

> We just usually run around with my cousins and do some dangerous things like… My family does like weird things [like] go knock on doors and run away. Throw rocks on anything.

Social Roles. Ten girls described their *social roles* in the spaces that they occupy. Girls described their roles as a friend, partner, student, family member, and community member. One girl shared her role as a friend, "[I] like [to] keep it in mind that they are going through a rough time and try to cheer them up." In relation to the school context, one girl mentioned that her role was "making everybody laugh", another girl said, "I like running around, like back and forth to other people telling them something. I'm like a mailbox." Additionally, three out of the ten girls

mentioned their responsibility to their family, for example, “I like helping them [grandparents] out mostly because…they’re getting older, and they have one more person living with them, my uncle”. Six girls shared that they give back to their community, for example, “I love it when I…just make someone smile.”

Domain of the Influences on Identity Development

Who Influences her Being. Fifteen of the 16 girls commented on many systems of influence that shape their Being. The girls most frequently identified family members particularly, eight girls mentioned general family, six girls spoke about their mother, four girls identified their grandma/ grandparent(s), and three girls mentioned their father in relation to identity influences. One girl exemplified family influences by noting that she “[becomes] stronger [by my family] talk[ing] to me about things in life.” Notably, not all influences were positive, as one girl shared that her parents arguing was detrimental, “…it made me feel kind of like…low self-esteem. I wasn’t good enough. So I guess that’s why I have low self-esteem.” Beyond family systems, the most frequently identified systems of influence were: nine girls referenced school, eight girls described friends, four girls mentioned partner, three girls identified community influences, and three girls described land and culture. In particular, one girl felt a sense of belonging with her new friends, “At my old school, I used to feel like I never fit in. So now with my new friends, I feel like I fit in with them… They are all really funny and I’m funny.”

Additionally, girls identified the importance of their partners on their identity, for example:

> …He’s always there. Always calls me nice things, like never really ever calls me by name. He always calls me beautiful no matter how I look, so it kind of comforts me, because I might be having like, [my] hair is all messy, or something and he will still call

me beautiful. It just takes some pressure off…He just always relaxes me [and] makes me feel secure.

Moreover, girls pointed to feeling proud about themselves through school, for example, "[I am] proud of myself for going so far in school. And people say 'oh you're almost done. I'm so proud of you.' It makes me feel proud inside. It makes me feel happy, caring, and stuff like that."

There were also community influences on Being. One of the girls shared how she felt about telling people that she is from Thunder Bay, "confident…because it's just a part of me. There's no point denying it." Culture also seemed to be impactful on the girls' processes of Being. One girl noted that she was involved in a sweat lodge that changed the way she behaved or felt around people and reported that she felt "protected" from that experience. Positive feelings about the land and location were also mentioned, "my reserve in the bush" is a special place because "it's peaceful, and I like it. It makes me feel good."

How She Feels About Herself in Relationships. The second subtheme under Influences on Identity Development domain is *how she feels about herself in relationships*. This subtheme builds on the previous subtheme of *who influences her identity development* by describing how the girls felt about themselves in relationship to those influences. The most populated positive codes were that girls felt good and celebrated; and supported and cared for. Given that some adjectives were similar in terms of their foundational attributes, I collapsed them into these two categories using a bottom-up process (see Methods). Twelve girls mentioned that they felt good and celebrated, some through their parents taking them on trips, "spoiling", or visiting them. For example, one girl said: "He [my dad] was the only person that I wanted to be there. Because he thought he was going to be in jail for my graduation". Seven girls reported being supported and cared for, which included descriptions such as, being "helped", "protected", "comforted". One

girl noted that she was supported by her grandmother, “I knew my mom would come back…every time she left…My grandma told me not to worry about anything —she’ll come back anyways. So I just [got] up and went back to sleep.” Another girl noted that the best thing her family ever did was, “help me out with things…Just taking care of me and telling me it will be okay.”

Of note, eight girls also described negative feelings about themselves in relationship to others such as, low self-esteem, confused, feeling unsafe and unwanted, and being racially discriminated against. One girl shared her perceptions of racism at school:

> Why do you care so much between the Native and I’m kinda of white looking for a Native ─ so they don’t like. Sometimes you just kinda get that vibe that they hate you when you walk by [and] they look at you.

The same girl shared that kept her Indigenous side hidden at school:

> But I don’t think that they [other Indigenous students] should be scared because, like me, I know I’m Native but I’m white too and [I] take my Native culture more like private. But I don’t see why they just can’t all get along.

In summary, the process of Being in identity development contained domains of girls’ personal and relational self, as well as, influences on how they view themselves in the present moment.

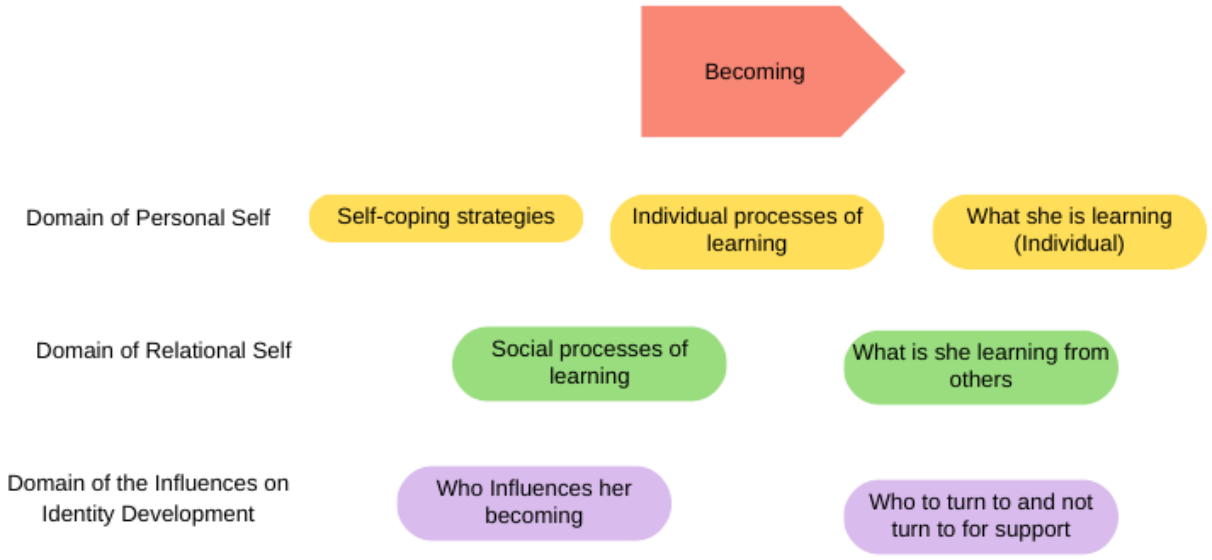
Theme 2: Becoming

Domain of Personal Self

In the Becoming theme, the domain of Personal Self consisted of the following subthemes: 1) Self-coping strategies, 2) Individual processes of learning, and 3) What she is learning. (See Appendix E for the frequency of codes, girls commented, and coded comments for the primary theme of Becoming).

Figure 5.

Anishinaabe Girls' Stage of Becoming and its Subsequent Domains and Subthemes



Self-Coping Strategies. Thirteen of the 16 girls shared *self-coping strategies*. The girls reported 16 different coping strategies. The most frequently identified strategies were journaling, listening to music, and talking to someone, with most girls choosing to speak with their friends. For example, one girl shared her coping strategy when her stepmother was angry at her:

> I hurry to go to my friends to talk with her…Sometimes when I am at home and I can't go to my friend's house, I usually just go to my room and start crying and I accidentally broke this clock last time and it was really expensive.

An exemplary quote about journaling as a self-coping strategy was:

> Sometimes I write in my journal book and I write what happened to me and how my whole day goes. And after I shoot the book away, I rip the papers up and I shoot them away so I forget about it after. And it helps me become stronger...

Although less referenced, some girls sought counselling, participated in a sweat lodge, and joined a healing circle.

Individual Processes of Learning. The second subtheme under the Personal Self domain was the *individual processes of learning* of who the girls are becoming. For this study, individual processes of learning comprised self-directed learning that does not necessarily involve other people. Twelve of the 16 girls shared their individual learning processes of learning by doing and learning by self-reflection. Of note, seven girls spoke about learning by doing. Specifically, the girls learned from their own past experiences or mistakes; for example, experimenting with substances, and joining a gang. One girl shared what she would tell her younger relative based on her past mistakes, "To never smoke or get into drinking or do drugs…Because I used to smoke, like a lot. Like every day, and now I have troubles breathing. I can't run far anymore." Another individual process of learning was self-reflection. Self-reflection involved an evaluation of choices and a consideration of the possible consequences of those choices:

> If someone offered me [drug name], I have been thinking about it for a couple of years or something like that, I'll try it but I wouldn't want to try it by myself. I wouldn't want my friend to.

A reflection of consequences and decisions tended to align with one's values. In response to why one girl did not drink or do drugs, she explained, "Because I know it's just going to get me into trouble."

What She is Learning. The third subtheme under the Personal Self was *What she is learning*. Eight of the 16 girls described what they were learning, such as gratitude, self-awareness, and not doing substances. For example, one girl learned gratitude from a character in a book, "She should be more thankful of life... It really inspired me…That you should thank life more often and thank the things that made you or who you are now."

Domain of Relational Self

The Relational Self domain consists of the following subthemes: 1) Social processes of learning, and 2) What she is learning from others.

Social Processes of Learning. I conceptualized *social processes of learning* as learning that occurs within the context of relationships, for example, relationships to others and to the land/nature. The social processes of learning include learning by observing, reflecting on choices in relation to others, confrontation, and reaching out for support. Eleven of the 16 girls mentioned learning by observation. One girl mentioned that she learned life values from her family, "It's just what I've learned from my family and I watch [them]. Mostly I [am] watching, learning, growing up, and seeing what they do. I learn from them." From observing, girls also learned what not to participate in:

> I don't understand why people drink. Because, it's like you're abusing yourself and I used to do it but I know what happens now, I just don't want to be like my aunties.

When asked what made her stop, she replied, "When I see my mom drink and everything." Another girl learned about the patterns in how others view her based on her racial appearance and social economic status:

> I have kind of the best of both worlds. I kinda look white than Native at the same time. Kinda like mixed thing — [It] could be the other way. In foster care… I came from a poverty home. But at the same time when I was younger, my family was on the poverty side but then at the same time I was [in] middle class. You can see different patterns between and how those people interact and just kinda get that feel for it.

Another social process of learning was reflecting on choices derived from relationships with others. This involved evaluating choices and at times experience the conflict between them. For example, one girl shared that she experienced tension about what she would like to change about

herself:

> I guess my pride… 'cause sometimes it might get in the way. Like…my friends, this one time they ditched me [and] I didn't talk to them for about three weeks. And like I really really wanted to [talk to them], but I didn't want them to think I was backing down or something for our little disagreement. I wanted to hold my thing. I really didn't want to swallow my pride…That gets in my way sometimes.

Five girls shared social learning processes that involved confrontation to jointly arrive at solution. When asked about ways to solve interpersonal conflict, one girl replied. "I usually talk my problems through with her… whether it was calling them or writing them an email or something and then setting up some time when we could talk.

Another wished to confront her mother to mend their relationship:

> I wish I could go see my mom…She lives in Calgary. I haven't seen her in a long time. I think that I would probably wish to see [her] because we haven't had the greatest relationship and I wasn't really that nice to her. That's one person that I haven't been that nice to, my mom. And I'm not really mad at her anymore. And I haven't had the chance to tell her…

Another component under social processes of learning is reaching out for support. One girl noted that she received wisdom from her parents and highlighted intergenerational knowledge transmission, "I can talk to them [parents]. More than your parents, because sometimes your parents don't understand you. And grandparents know because they went through it. And they taught their kids." Another girl received guidance from her mother and friends to assist in her learning:

> Probably my mom and my friends. They all have their input in to what I should do. But I usually go, when my mom says no and then I think about [it] and then I do what I think is best for me...

What She Is Learning From Others. The last subtheme under Relational Self is *What she is learning from others*. Fifteen out of 16 girls described what they learned from others. In particular, six girls mentioned what they learned about other people, six girls learned right from wrong, five girls learned about life in general, five girls learned about substances, three girls learned how to behave around people, and three girls learned respect and how to listen. (This does not include girls who were impacted by substances by other people[5]). One girl shared what she learned about others, specifically how to "cope with" and "survive" parental conflict through forgiveness:

> I went to counseling. Like I used to go to sweat lodges, healing circles and talk about it. And talk to a medicine woman…It helped me understand like what they did was wrong and they go to learn how to forgive them because it wasn't their fault. Well, it is their fault but I got to learn to think that.

Therefore, resilience seemed to come from a place of understanding. Girls also learned about how to behave around other people from others. For example:

> I think I've got my street smarts. Like, who you should be associated with and who you shouldn't and…when to open your mouth about things and when not to. How to act around certain people. Drugs, you got to know about drugs…[and] how to take care of yourself and your options.

[5] Ten out of 16 girls were impacted by other people's substance use. Often, girls reported to be impacted by their parents and grandparents' substance use.

The same girl was asked where she learned her street smarts. She replied, “[by] mostly watching people. I guess probably more watching and seeing the patterns.” Moreover, girls mentioned that they learned to be respectful from others:

> I have learned from [my] friend, my grandma, and my mom to respect the elders as much you can even if they might be kind of bossy to you just to respect them. To basically respect everybody not to mouth off to your parents, stuff like that.

Another girl learned to "listen to your elders…It’s just what I’ve learned from my family.” Some girls spoke about learning about life in general, “My mom taught me about life”. Moreover, some girls attributed learning right from wrong from someone. For example, one girl shared how she took care of her problems, “Telling someone and they will tell you what you would do and what was wrong and what was right.” In addition, girls learned about the consequences of using substances from others. For example, one girl learned the negative impacts of drinking, “Stop drinking and all of us kid would be together again.” Also, “It [drinking] just ruins… family.”

Domain of the Influences on Identity Development

In relation to Becoming, subthemes under the Influences on Identity Development domain are 1) Who influences her becoming, and 2) Who to turn to and not turn to for support.

Who Influences her Becoming. All 16 girls mentioned those *who influenced her becoming* including family, friends, community members, culture, nature, school, and media (e.g., books and movies). One girl described how nature provided a space to ground herself and think:

> I like [to] look at nature. It’s pretty. It gives me a chance to think because it’s not where people hang out. People just go there to ride their bike or walk their dog and have their own solitude. So it kind of gives me peace ─ to sit there and walk and think things out

without being bothered and enjoy the view.

All 16 girls spoke about family influences on identity development particularly on Becoming. Twelve girls referred to their mother, four mentioned (biological, foster, boarding) parent(s), five girls described their grandma, and five girls mentioned their auntie or uncle. One girl mentioned that she learned most from her maternal family, "I learn lots from pretty much just my family because my mom had 16 brothers and sisters. So I learned pretty much everything from my family." Grandmothers were integral influences on Becoming. For example, "[from] my grandma, I know how to…respect people, not to tease, ya, respect." One girl shared who she learned the most from, "My granny and auntie [name of auntie]… they know a lot about culture." Another girl mentioned how her grandparents supported her school attendance, "How do I get up every morning? My grandpa. My granny..." Although most girls spoke about positive family influences on their Becoming, three girls spoke about negative family experiences. For example, one girl reframed her negative experience to provide positive direction in her life, "I seen something… drinking… Everybody… my aunts, sisters, brothers, my dad…I just don't want to drink…They act stupid."

Beyond the family, 11 girls shared that their friends were influential to their Becoming. One girl said:

> I know not to do bad things. Like when I was hanging out with this other crowd, they would drink and smoke and stuff and I would tag along with them. But now my other friends, my new ones, they sometimes do bad things but I don't do it. I just walk away with my other friends.

Community members also shaped identity development on Becoming. Seven girls referenced community members including their teacher, counsellor, and a medicine woman. One

girl mentioned how important it was to her to have an Indigenous teacher at her school, "…she is like the only Native teacher that is there. Because we have all [have] those teachers there but she is the only one that is Native." When asked about how an Indigenous teacher is different from other teachers, she replied, "Because she knows more about my problems."

Who to Turn to and Not Turn to for Support. The second subtheme under Influences on Identity Development is *who to turn to and not turn to for support*. Fourteen of the 16 girls identified characteristics of who to turn to and not turn to. Thirteen of those 14 girls identified positive characteristics of those who they would turn to. These characteristics included: someone who is knowing, understanding, trusting, helpful, caring, and open to talk about anything. The most common characteristic identified was someone who is knowing, which was referred to by eight girls. One girl said who she would turn to when in trouble, "My grandparents… Because they know what to do." The second most common code was someone who is trusting, which was shared by five girls. For example:

> Well, my auntie because I can tell her anything and she would just give me advice…I can tell her anything and she wouldn't go out and tell other people. And the same with [friend name]. I can tell her everything and she wouldn't feel weird around me or anything… They're people I trust.

The third most frequently commented characteristic was someone who is caring, mentioned by five girls. I collapsed characteristics of someone who is caring, comforting, helpful, non-judgemental into one umbrella term, caring. An example quote is:

> I have a lot of trust in my family and my friend [name]. Her dad always helps me out. Like he'll come and pick me up if something is wrong, then take me back to his place, like to [friend name] and I can like sleep there if I wanted to.

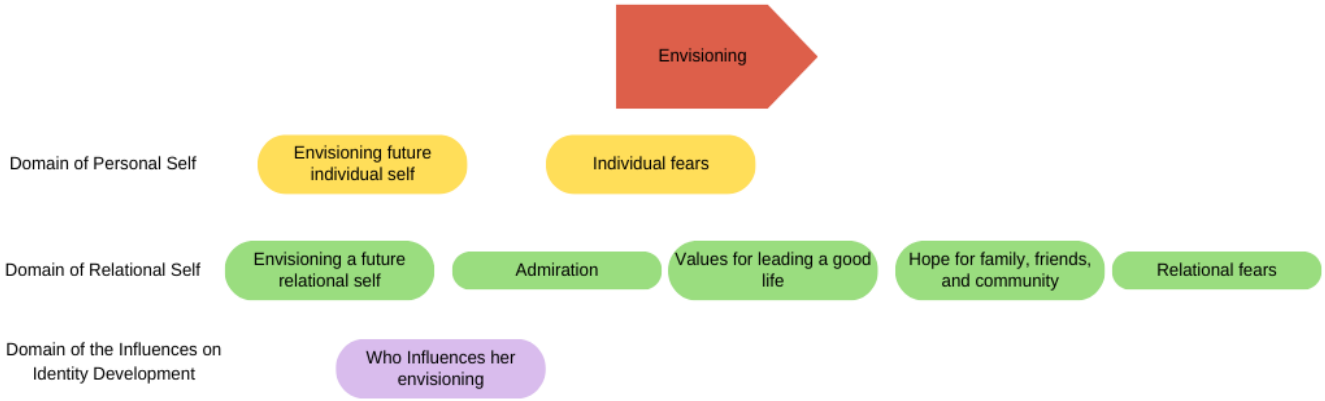
Although 13 girls described characteristics of who to turn to for support, five of the 16 girls also shared characteristics of who not to turn to for support. The negative characteristics were people being strict, not trusting, invalidating, and lack of emotional closeness with the girls. An interviewer asked one the girls why she would not go to her parents for support, she responded, “Because my dad, I’m not close to my dad. And my mom, she’s kind of strict, so I can’t tell her really anything.” In summary, the primary theme of Becoming includes subthemes under three domains of the Personal Self (self-coping strategies, individual processes of learning, what she is learning), the Relational Self (social processes of learning, what she is learning from others), and the Influences on Identity Development (who influences her becoming, and who to turn to and not turn to for support).

Theme 3: Envisioning

The Envisioning stage is a future-oriented identity process comprised of one’s hopes, dreams, and fears (adapted from Battiste, 2000). All 16 girls spoke about the primary theme of Envisioning with a total of 265 coded comments. (See Appendix F for the frequency of codes, girls commented, and coded comments for the primary theme of Envisioning).

Figure 6.

Anishinaabe Girls’ Stage of Envisioning and its Subsequent Domains and Subthemes



Domain of Personal Self

The subthemes of the Personal Self domain are 1) Envisioning of future individual self, and 2) Individual fears.

Envisioning of Future Individual Self. Fifteen girls shared comments related to *envisioning of future individual self.* These generally referred to wanting to improve aspects of themselves, as well as academic, career, family, and cultural goals. Nine girls shared that they wanted to improve their school performance, attitude, drinking, and doing better in general. Four girls wanted to improve their school performance, for example:

> I know that I am smart, but I just say I don't because I don't think that I am but I just bring myself down a lot. And how do I know that? Because I slack off too easily and I just mostly pay attention but I could really do better.

Three girls wanted to change their attitude. When asked what she would like to change, one girl replied, "Some of my judgements on people…Well, because some people are really good but the way I see them, they are not that cool as other people because of some of the things they do to me." Another girl mentioned what she would like to change, "Being a hot head, like getting mad easily because I get that from my mom and dad." Beyond changes about themselves, eight girls shared proximal or distal academic goals. Five girls referred to proximal goals such as, passing their grade or graduating. For example, one girl shared her goal of "Trying to pass grade 7." Five girls discussed distal academic goals of obtaining post-secondary education at a college or university —"I'll probably go to college and then university." Furthermore, ten girls envisioned their future career as a nurse, doctor, paramedic, child mental health counsellor, teacher, lawyer, interior designer, or model. One girl shared her dream of becoming a teacher to carry on the practice of Indigenous language:

> I want to…become teacher…because I feel that the world always is going to need teachers. And it's just something I would have fun doing…I would have fun with it. Or I would want to go into something like an aboriginal teacher and learn more about the language because I see that the language isn't used much these days. All the people are like dying off...

Further, three girls shared family-related goals of wanting to start a family of their own for example, "[I want to] Be a foster parent…I would help them. Because I would… most understand [what] they are feeling." Moreover, four girls discussed strengthening cultural connectivity, for example: "I want to go to New Mexico for the powwow… And in Albourqurqe, they have the biggest powwow there, so I want to go." "I want to say that before I die, I want to shoot a moose…" and "… I want to learn more about my culture."

Individual Fears. The second subtheme under Personal Self is *individual fears* about the future. Four girls mentioned their personal fears of not reaching their own goals and general worries. A quote about what one girl is most afraid of is, "That I am not going to graduate from high school." Another mentioned fears about her potential:

> I am most afraid that I won't live up to everything that I set myself to have…[What] is in the way? My commitment to it pretty much…I always find I want to do something different. Like, there are so many options and I get so distracted. Even though I have decided to become one, another seems just as good, but [I] can't bounce around. What if I am wrong?

Similarly, a girl described, "What if …[I]will lose my priorities... If I screw up bad enough." Another was afraid of how her parents' "drinking problems" would affect her future, "What is going to happen to me?"

Domain of Relational Self

The subthemes of the Relational Self domain are: 1) Envisioning a future relational self; 2) Admiration; 3) Values for leading a good life; 4) Hope for family, friends, and community; and 5) Relational fears.

Envisioning Future Relational Self. Twelve girls shared envisioning of their *future relational self* including, family togetherness, friend togetherness, being agents of change, and improving on one's relational characteristics. Seven girls shared wanting family togetherness of being with their mother, father, grandmother, or uncle. When asked what she would like to happen just once, one girl responded, "If my parents would get back together. Stop drinking and all of us kids would be together again." Another girl mentioned that she would like to spend more time with her grandmother, "Like I don't really see her enough like spend more time with her because she lives in [location] and I like don't really get to see her or do anything with her." Another girl mentioned wanting her father to be more present in her life:

> If I was to choose, I would change how my dad was. I wish that he was around more…Most of my friends do have dads and they are always around. Like it's not the same, especially, like if I didn't have a dad for my whole life then [I] wouldn't know how it was but I had a dad and he kind of like is not around anymore, so it's kind of a change.

In addition to family togetherness, four girls wished to spend more time with their friends or meeting new people. One shared her wish of, "See[ing] one of my friends again." Another's wish was, "If I could have all my friends from the past here… Ones I have not seen for a long time." Related to Envisioning the future self, two girls wanted to become agents of community or global change, for example, "[I wish that I could] change the world somehow or change

somebody's views on something" Another girl described her dreams of positively changing her community:

> One of my goals would probably be …Native people, like why they insist on fighting, prejudice... I find [that] they fight a lot more and feel that they have to do drug[s] in order to be cool… I wish I could like just break in and open their eyes... Better them…Educate them.

Lastly, four girls wanted to change themselves on a relational level. When asked about what would you change about yourself, one girl said, "I always don't think before I say anything and that causes a lot of problems in the situation…Like I say something stupid and then I regret it 20 minutes later."

Admiration. The second subtheme under Relational Self is *admiration*. I placed *admiration* in the Envisioning stage because the girls discussed admirable people and admirable characteristics. These admirable characteristics may inspire them to work towards who they want to be. Eleven girls shared who they admire such as, their mother, grandma, cousin, friend, community member (e.g., counsellor), and artists. The girls most commented on their mother, with three girls citing this, for example:

> I keep on saying my mom, but I have to say my mom again. She raised four kids pretty much by herself. Because even when my dad was living with us, he works for six months of the year, so he was gone for half the time. So, she pretty much raised us four by herself.

One girl shared the person she admired most, "My granny…[because] she teaches me lots of stuff…[like] how to speak Ojibway." Another was asked what types of things her grandmother, a

community leader, showed her as she looked up to her, “Well, she was just a strong woman and she had lots or pride in whatever she did and was really wise.”

Friends were also admired, however this depended on their choices. For example:

> Sometimes… I’ll look up to them [my friend] and then they’ll do something that I wouldn’t do or I would advise them not to do, like doing coke, or whatever. And then you just kind of look down on them afterwards.

The girls also identified the positive characteristics of the people they admire, such as embodying strength, wisdom, courage to stand up for what is right, leadership and abstinence from drinking.

Values For Leading a Good Life. The third subtheme under Relational Self is *values for leading a good life*. Seven out of 16 girls identified values for leading a good life, such as substance refusal, do what is right, learn from one’s mistakes, listen, be authentic and respectful. The most frequently mentioned is to be yourself, with two girls referencing this, for example, “To be yourself. Don’t think much about what other people care about you as much as it does bother you, to be yourself always.”

Hope for Family, Friends, and Community. The fourth subtheme under Relational Self is *hope for family, friends, and community*. Fourteen of the 16 girls shared what they would like to see in the future regarding their family, friends, and community. Seven girls shared their hopes for the younger generation for example, learn from one’s mistakes, know what is right from wrong, prioritize safety, and to stay in school. Seven girls also shared hope for their family members, such as their mother, father, sibling, and grandmother. One girl yearned for an increase in her mother’s self-esteem:

> I would change my mom because I'm just feeling that we used to blame her for a lot of things and like it was kind of wrong…I would change her coping skills. I would change …more of her self-esteem [to] make her feel better; like she is worth something, [that] she's not worthless, [and] her choice in men…Like she always picks the really bad evil ones.

Five girls explained that they would like their family to refrain from doing substances for example, "My dad. I would change his ways like his alcoholism." Another remarked who she would like to change, "Probably be my mom because of her drinking problem…Because right now she has to go for treatment. That's why I can't see her right now." Some wished to see their family members happy and safe. Two girls shared what they envision for their friends, including, wanting their friend to leave an unhealthy peer group and to stop substance use. Nine girls also shared what they hope to see in their community, such as more youth centres, reduced substance use, and an end to community violence. Girls noted youth boredom in their communities:

> There's nothing to do. You have nothing for like teenagers my age to do. People don't get along, there's always lots of fighting, families don't get along… [We need] Just like a place like a youth centre or something where we could go and hang out...

One girl described, "There's a lot of anger still in the community. People are always fighting." She hoped for more community workshops to combat community violence, "I think workshops would do good. Like during the summer programming… workshops about anything…more community involvement and activities." Many also expressed hope for reducing community substance use, "I noticed that people really get angry when they are drinking and I guess their mind plays with them when they are drunk." When asked about what could be done about anger and violence in the community, one girl replied, "To only let alcohol out on special occasions

and not to have it often."

Relational Fears. Eleven girls shared *relational fears*. Nine girls described fear over a family member getting hurt or passing away (e.g., their mother, father, parents, siblings, uncle, and grandmother). One girl mentioned fears about her mother getting hurt:

> Whenever I am not with my mom I feel that she is going to get hurt because, like when I used to live with her, her boyfriends would always really hurt her. And I am afraid that it's going to happen.

In response to a question about what she is most afraid of, one girl responded, "Like with my friends that if I get into a fight that they won't be friends with me anymore. Losing my friends. Like if someone crosses my boundaries". Another girl expressed fear about her parents separating, "what will happen if my parents split up".

Domain of the Influences on Identity Development

Who Influences her Envisioning.

Two girls described who influenced what they want in the future. One girl mentioned following in the footsteps of her family, "I always wanted to be a nurse. Like my grandma was nurse, my aunt was a nurse." Another girl mentioned how school helped her decide what she wants to become, "It's just interesting learning about different subjects... Stuff like that…It helps me…what I want to become when I grow up…I was thinking about being a nurse." In summary, the Anishinaabe girls envisioned their future-oriented personal and relational selves, and their influences on their desired future forward.

Discussion: Indigenous Girls' Threading Their Identity through Weaving the Ribbon Skirt

In this study, I explored the processes of identity development with the voices of 16 Anishinaabe girls aged 12 to 18 years. The data originated from the "Talking Back: Aboriginal Girls Telling Their Stories" (*Talking Back project*), that spanned from years 2003 to 2006. Drs. Kirsten Madsen, Debra Pepler, and Susan Dion developed the Talking Back project in collaboration with Dilico Anishinabek Family Care (Dilico), an Indigenous multi-service agency. The Talking Back project was created to understand Indigenous adolescent girls' lived experiences associated with aggressive behaviour (Dion, 2013). All the girls interviewed resided from Thunder Bay and surrounding communities.

For this study, I drew upon a relational-developmental perspective from Cardinal and Pepler's "Community Journey of Change through Relational Determinants of Health" model (2021). Specifically, I adapted their model to elucidate that critical cultural strengths repair and restore healthy identity development processes, which have been and continue to be fragmented and disrupted by colonialism (Cardinal & Pepler, 2021). Consistent with Indigenous epistemology of oral knowledge (Lavallée, 2009), I used an inductive thematic analysis approach to have the girls' voices take precedence using their words to guide the process of generating codes, subthemes, domains, and themes. In efforts to represent the girls' voices as closely as possible in a decolonizing way, I conveyed the girls' stories in a transparent and semantic manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By using this approach, I recognized that the Anishinaabe girls who participated were the experts of their own life experiences. As explained by an Anishinaabe researcher, "…Anishinaabe ceremonies existed long before settler societies arrived in the Americas, which makes Indigenous peoples the original researchers of these territories" (Debassige, 2013, p. 16).

Preliminary Findings

Overarching Themes

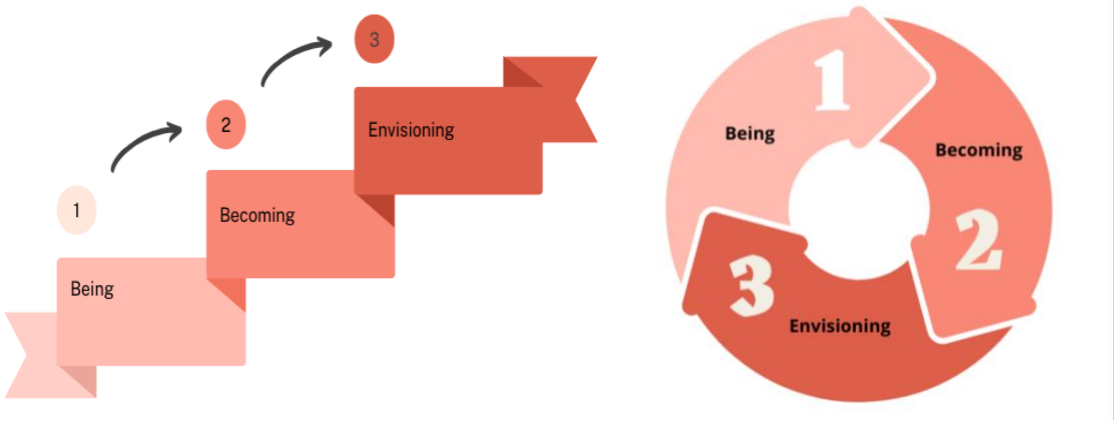
In their interviews, all 16 girls discussed three general processes of identity development: Being, Becoming, and Envisioning. Based on the girls' interviews, I developed a model to illustrate the overarching themes of developmental processes of identity development by an unfolding of a red ribbon (Figure 7a). The increased gradient in each emerging stage shows the developmental processes of Being, Becoming, and Envisioning. Briefly put, Being is about a girl's current developmental stage, Becoming is the active process of understanding who she is, and the Envisioning stage is a future-oriented lens. The ribbon illustrates continuity in these developmental processes. Continuity or the sense of sameness in identity development is consistent with Indigenous and Western theories on identity (e.g., Maracle, 2021; Chandler, 2013, Simpson, 2017; Harris et al., 2013; Erikson, 1950; Erikson, 1968). A sense of sameness in identity development is echoed in the words of Michèle Audette, an Innu woman and Inuit commissioner of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry, "The present can only be understood in relation to the past: we must know our past, understand it and accept it, if the future is to have meaning" (MMIGW, 2019, p. 8). In the current study, the sense of continuity in identity was shared by the Indigenous girls, and could be explored in future research on identity development to determine whether continuity in identity formation is a universal phenomenon.

In addition to the girls' continuity in their sense of self, their processes of identity development were ongoing, fluid, dynamic, and interconnected. A moment in time and place is not an isolated event but has dynamic effects in all directions linking past, present, and future (Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, n.d.). Figure 7b illustrates this cyclical nature of an interwoven

dynamic among the three overarching themes. All the themes impact each other and the lines between each stage are not clear-cut, as apparent through the girls' interviews. The girls described orienting themselves to the present through making deliberate choices, which was linked to how they wanted their future to look like. In the Becoming stage, the girls navigated the path toward whom they wanted to become so they could walk with intent and purpose in the present. Therefore, Envisioning the future impacted their Being, which was connected through the process of Becoming. In the Anishinaabe worldview, time is never perceived as linear but as an organizing structure of moving in spirals that blends past, present, and future allowing for transformative movement (Absolon, 2010; Fitzpatrick, 2018).

Figure 7.

The Nature of the Processes of Identity Development



7a. 7b.

Note: Ribbons on ribbon skirts, represents womanhood/girlhood and strength (Heitland, n.d.). Ribbons are also worn to remember the missing and murdered Indigenous sisters and to acknowledge those who are coming into their journey of identity reclamation and colonial resistance (Heitland, n.d.). Ribbon skirts are an outward expression of Indigeneity (Indigenous identity) by taking pride in being Indigenous (Peltier & Ansloos, 2021). The images in Figures

7a and 7b were created and adapted from canva.com.

Domains, Subthemes, and Codes

By listening to the voices of the Anishinaabe girls, I generated three overarching themes with a total of 25 subthemes of identity development. There were 12 subthemes associated with the general theme of Being; seven subthemes were associated with the theme of Becoming; and there were six subthemes associated with the theme of Envisioning. (See Figure 3 on page 31 for an organized list of subthemes under the developmental processes of Being, Becoming, and Envisioning. The girls' revealed three general domains: Personal Self, Relational Self, and the Influences on Identity Development illustrated in Figure 3).

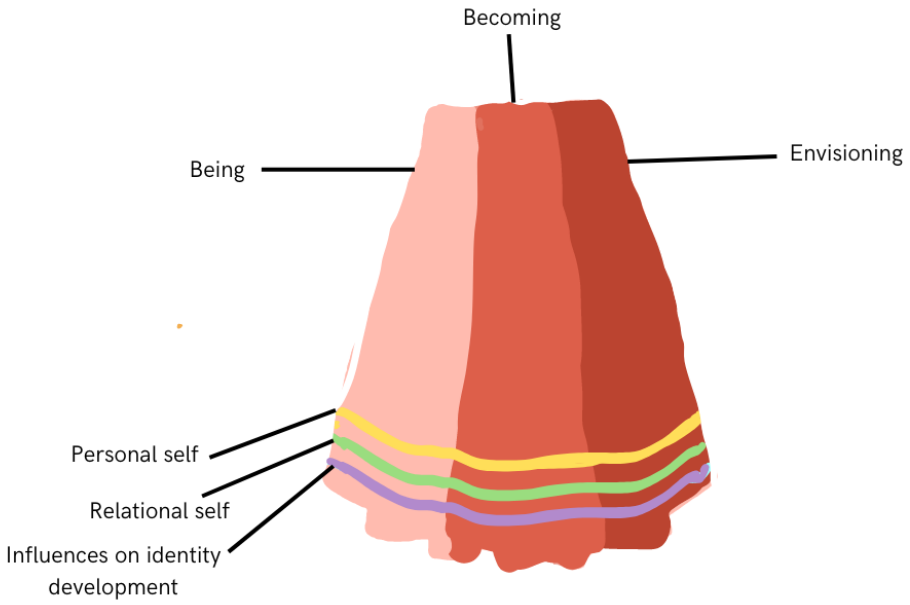
Domain of Personal and Relational Selves. In the current study, the Personal Self was conceptualized as characteristics that define who one is as a unique individual which consists of personal values and developmental positionality (adapted from Turner et al., 1994). I referred to the Relational Self domain as categories that define a person in regards to shared similarities with members of a particular group, culture, or place (adapted from McCubbin et al., 2013). The boundaries between personal and relational selves are blurred (Turner et al., 1994) and remain arbitrary in this study. Nonetheless, coding consensus was sought to categorize the subthemes in a bottom-up analysis into domains of personal and relational selves.

The findings of this study can be integrated and wholistically represented by a ribbon skirt, which is integral to Anishinaabe culture (Heiland, n.d.). The three gradients of red fabric aligned vertically are the foundational themes of Being, Becoming, and Envisioning (See Figure 8). The ribbons that circle around the skirt created with the foundational fabric identify the domains that represent the developmental processes and their associated subthemes. I selected a ribbon skirt to exemplify the continuity of identity processes and the interconnectedness of the

domains and subthemes. The circles of ribbons attached to the foundational fabric together signify the whole sense of self consistent with the Anishinaabe teachings of womanhood, cyclical conception of time, and connectivity with All My Relations (Heitland, n.d.; Wagamese, 2016).

Figure 8.

Ribbon Skirt Analogy of Being, Becoming, and Envisioning



Being. The girls commented on their personal characteristics, developmental changes, desire for autonomy, body image, values, and standards in respect to their Being stage. The girls' expressed desire for autonomy and body image concerns were consistent with research on non-Indigenous adolescent girls' needs for independence and the importance of physical appearance (e.g., Fleming, 2005; Tiggermann & Slater, 2013). In this study, the girls' values were often expressed in relation to others, for example, valuing time spent with friends and family members. Similarly, the girls' standards often included social expectations of kinship, such as being a good friend or partner.

The girls described their Relational Selves, which comprised their relational characteristics, efforts to protect their self-image with others, social engagement, and recognition of social responsibilities. Consistent with the Anishinaabe worldview that everything is interconnected and interdependent (Absolon, 2010), the girls' shared slightly more relational identity characteristics compared to personal characteristics, which are associated with uniqueness. Many codes under the personal characteristics subtheme were attributes about the Personal Self manifested in social spheres such as, being funny and (street) smart. The girls' relational self-descriptions were generally about attending to others and fitting in to obtain balanced and harmonious relationships, such as being caring, helpful, understanding, perceptive, honest, and gentle. The girls viewed others as an intrinsic part of the self, known in the Western literature as an interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Generally, research in this field indicated that Indigenous peoples hold interdependent constructions of the self that emphasize group orientation and social relatedness in sustaining community's needs (Kirmayer et al., 2008; Beckstein et al., 2022). In contrast, Western peoples from Europe and North America tend to favour independence and views of being self-contained/separated from others eliciting an idiocentric configuration of traits, abilities, and motives, for example, "I am creative" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These approaches to understanding the self are linked to prevailing ways of knowing, being, and doing, and have widespread influences on cognition, emotion, and motivation (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Given that there were slightly more comments coded within the relational than personal characteristics domains, an area of further study may be to investigate this "dichotomy" as a spectrum rather than dichotomous poles. Exploring both Western and Indigenous self-construals could advance the understanding on the development of identity within varying and perhaps bi-cultural contexts and their clinical implications.

There was some consistency in this research on Anishinaabe girls' identity development and the extant literature. In Anderson's (2000) thematic analysis research on interviews with Indigenous adult women, she noted that the first process of identity formation is resistance. Similar to Anderson's research, Anishinaabe adolescent girls shared what they are not such as, [I am] not self-centered, violent, or competitive. The girls may have resisted negative representations of the self by expressing who they are not, which was supplanted by who they are. Therefore, resistance may also be crucial in the identity formation for Indigenous adolescent girls as a response to resisting colonial harms. In line with interdependent self-descriptions, many girls described social roles and engagement in providing and/or connecting with their friends, partner, nuclear and extended family, community, and culture. In the Anishinaabe culture, women (and men) have had roles and responsibilities within the Anishinaabe way of life since the beginning of Creation (Chiblow, 2019; Chiblow, 2023). Indigenous women were described as "keepers of relationships" as they were considered guardians responsible for providing care and nurturance in their family and community critical for the health of the whole nation (Anderson, 2011, p. 12). Anishinaabe youths are entering into the life passage where they are expected to "fully contribute to the adult work of the community" (Anderson, 2011, p. 12). In the present study, the girls recognized their social role in building healthy relationships that may be more developed and refined as they continue on their journey to womanhood.

Becoming. In the Becoming stage, girls described their active processes in learning and understanding who they were. The girls learned self-coping strategies such as, talking to a friend as an alternative to breaking expensive things. They also expressed that they learned a variety of lessons such as, knowing right from wrong, how to behave around others, gratitude, and to avoid substance use. From what they learned, the girls described individual processes of learning by

doing (experiential), and self-reflection (an evaluation of choices and its consequences). The girls also shared learning through social processes, such as learning by observing, reflecting on choices, confronting, and reaching out for support. These findings were consistent Anishinaabe ways of knowing. Anishinaabe peoples sought knowledge through lived experiences, direct observation, experiential learning, and learning with both the heart and mind from community (Chibow, 2019; Bell, 2013). Anishinaabe Elder, Basil Johnston (1976), asserted that Anishinaabe youth are at a time of quest for purpose strengthening their mental and physical capacity, consistent with youths' increased search for knowledge and learning. Notably, Anishinaabe researchers explained an accumulation of lived and learned knowledge is a life-long process (Chiblow, 2019; Johnston, 1982).

Envisioning. The Envisioning stage is a future-oriented lens of identity that accompanies hope, dreams, and fears about one's future (adapted from Battiste, 2000). In regards to the Personal Self, the girls envisioned both proximal and distal goals such as academic, career, family, and cultural goals. According to the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (Assembly of First Nations and Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2015), mental wellness is enriched when people have hope for their future, meaning, purpose, and belonging grounded in their identity. Similar to Anishinaabe girls, non-Indigenous emerging adults construct their future orientations concerning career and family hopes and plans by exploring and making commitments (Seginer & Noyman, 2005; Johnson et al., 2014). Possibly unique to Indigenous identity formation, the girls shared their dreams of increased cultural connectivity. In Heid and colleagues' (2022) scoping review of Indigenous youth and resilience, the importance of cultural continuity for youths' resilience and cultural identity was highlighted to promote positive future orientations.

Evident through the girls' interviews, the Relational Self was central to girls' sense of direction of where they were going. The girls wished for togetherness with friends and family, and wanted to improve themselves to restore or strengthen social harmony. Moreover, many girls described values for leading a good life that they would like their younger relatives to follow. Cree Elder Kathy described that for woman to pass on values to younger generations, they first must know who they are:

> The more centred you are in your life, the more you realize your true essence and purpose in life of being a strong Indigenous woman. Also I believe that, in order to live and be of help to anyone, we need to know and understand our own values. We need to know who we are. Then you can take risks to do things differently and contribute to society to bring about change. Because all of us can contribute that way. When we recognize our gifts from our Creator, anything is possible. You make it real as you continue to step forward (MMIWG, 2019, p. 42).

Because the Anishinaabe girls gathered their acquired knowledge and values from others, intended to be shared with younger relatives, the girls appeared to be developing a strong working understanding of their identity and their roles in their family and community.

The girls' shared values that aligned with Anishinaabe values. Bell (2013), an Anishinaabe woman, postulated that the values for leading a good life were instructions given to the Anishinaabeg by the Creator. Respect, relationship, reciprocity, and responsibility comprise the four foundational Anishinaabe values (Bell, 2013). These four values were echoed in the girls' voices, for example, "respect the Elders as much you can" (respect), "Being with my friends and family [makes me happy]" (relationship), "I know [my mom] cares about us a lot and we care about her" (reciprocity), and "I learned how to take care of… problems" (responsibility).

Domain of the Influences of Identity Development.

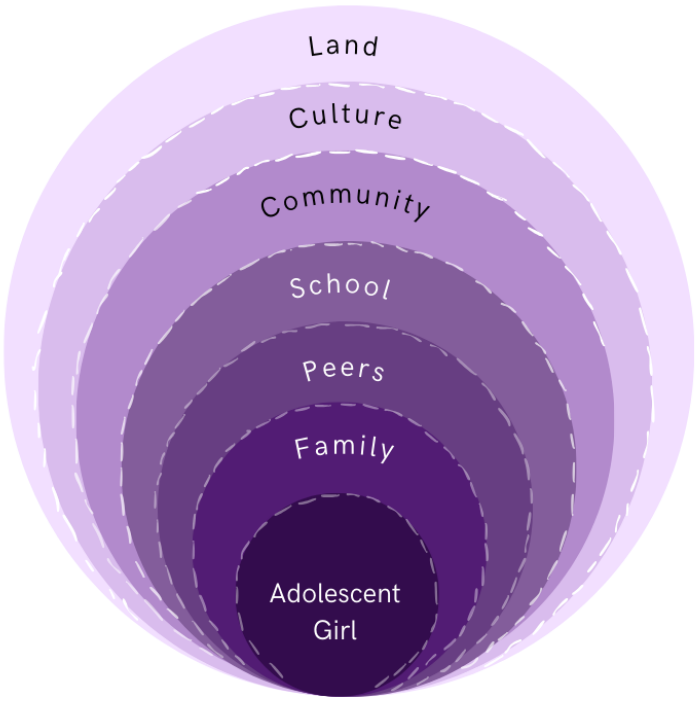
"Sweetgrass is the hair of our Mother; separately, each strand is not as strong as the strands are when braided together"

— Ojibwe Elder Mary Ritchie (1995, n.p.).

Many systems of support were integral throughout the girls' stages of identity development (See Figure 9). The girls' responses revealed that family, peers, school, community, culture, and land were all key to their identity formation.

Figure 9.

Systems of Influence on Identity Development



Note: Adapted from Whitbeck and colleagues' (2014) Indigenous Adolescent Development Model. In Anishinaabe culture, purple represents the self (Pitawanakwat, 2006), illustrated by a continuity of ribbons threaded together to form the girls' identity.

Within the Anishinaabe family network, there are different levels of family: the nuclear family, extended family, community family (common treaty), Nationhood family (all Anishinaabe peoples regardless of region), clan (matrilineal/patrilineal lines that link spiritual groups), and cultural family (connected by ceremonial practices) (Simard & Blight, 2011). Apparent through the girls' descriptions of their lived experience, family caregiving extended beyond the Western dyadic parenting style of a mother and/or father. In Muir and Bohr's (2014) review paper on "Contemporary Practice of Traditional Aboriginal Child Rearing", immediate and extended family nourishes emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical needs that structure a child's identity. In the current study, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, cousins, and biological, foster, boarding, or adopted parents were identified by the girls as influential in shaping their identity. Of note, kinship words of endearment, like auntie, are not constrained to blood relatives but can also refer to community members (Peltier, 2021). The girls described a special relationship with their Elders and grandmothers who became their primary caregivers in their bundle while their parent was unavailable (e.g., mothers being away for treatment). The girls' grandmothers worked to restore their critical cultural strengths and to find purpose and belonging. Ojibway Elder Lillian Pitawanakwat (2006) portrayed the bond between Elders and youth in this way:

> As a youth, I have to find people to help me in that time of continued growth, so I hook up with like-minded people to give me that nurturance that I think I need. And when our elders come in and say: "We have something for you; this is a gift I have for you; take a look at it; see what you think of it" - they're not saying, "I want you to follow these teachings." No. The elders are inviting them; as an elder, I invite the youth to be a part of my journey. And with that invitation, most of the time, they join me, just to hear out what

> has life, what has meaning, what has purpose. And their lives begin to change. They begin to take accountability, to form a life style. They're planning now to be a better parent, to have a career, all of that. That becomes their truth (n.p.).

In conjunction with or as an alternative to primary caregivers, Anishinaabe girls in the current study sought friends, partners, and community members for support, a sense of belonging, and direction in understanding who they were and where they were going. Consistent with the literature, Indigenous children looked for other sources of support aside from their parents, like their peers (Muir & Bohr, 2014). Anishinaabe girls noted the importance of choosing good friends and partners who make them feel good as role models to help them choose what is right. In the school environment, Anishinaabe girls had the opportunity to connect with their cultural identity (e.g., making moccasins, learning Ojibway). School also gave them the opportunity to be proud of their academic accomplishments, make and maintain friendships, and dream about their future career avenues through enrollment in a variety of school subjects. Teachers, especially Indigenous ones provided care, understanding, and guidance in their academic and personal lives. Many Anishinaabe girls interviewed were boarding students who travelled to Thunder Bay for school. During their time away, schools may be a primary source of cultural connection and wholistic support that informed the girls' identity development.

Some Anishinaabe girls described the importance of being on the land or being surrounded by nature. The land offered a space to quiet the mind, be grounded to think, and reflect on choices to make informed decisions. Anishinaabe land-based cultural knowledge comes from lived experience with the land and all things in Creation, those who had walked the earth (ancestors), and those who have yet to come (McGregor, 2013). Many Anishinaabe girls expressed a desire to deepen their connection to culture by going to powwows and learning their

language. The girls' hunger for culture coincided with what was witnessed in community. According to Nina Cordell from Thompson, Manitoba:

> We're in transition. Now we want to learn and relearn, accept the traditions and ceremonies, feel the beauty of the culture again. And be ready to welcome people back, be ready to help them connect back with being sacred again (FemNorthNet, 2016, p. 4).

Overall, it is through relationships embedded in socio-cultural environments that Anishinaabe girls are developing their identities.

Limitations

In this study, it was not my intention nor capacity to capture the rich diversity in the development of Anishinaabe identity, as there are innumerable individual and collective variations in the ways of knowing, being, and doing and in the places that they occupy (Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, n.d.). The adolescent girls in the present study spoke of different ways of how to be, which were predicated on their different family upbringings, peer, school, and community contexts; their developmental maturity and age, their experiences of trauma, and their strategies to develop resilience. My intent has been to move away from pan-Indigenizing the girls and rather to relay commonalities in themes, while at the same time appreciating the differences by quoting the girls' words.

I used transcribed interviews from the *Talking Back* project of eight clinically referred and eight girls recruited from communities. The Talking Back project was developed to support the partner organization, Dilico, in understanding the girls' aggressive behaviour problems. The focus of this study was not to compare girls who were clinically referred for aggression and internalizing mental health symptoms with those recruited from communities in the areas around Thunder Bay, Ontario. My primary interest was to study the processes of identity development as

revealed through the voices of the 16 girls collectively. Consistent with the literature (Muir, 2020), the girls' experiences of racism and discrimination rooted in colonialism are likely to have elicited their aggressive responses. Notably, the girls' aggressive behaviours were labelled as problematic; however, the girls, themselves, described their aggressive behaviour as a strategy to stand up for themselves and those they loved (Dion, 2013). One researcher on the Talking Back project argued that the girls used aggression to protect themselves or express their frustrations about their stresses (Dion, 2013). Therefore, a limitation of the current study is that the themes were derived from interviews with Anishinaabe girls, some of whom had been referred for aggressive behaviour problems, most likely rooted in the harms of colonialism. Therefore, the themes of the current study may not be generalizable to describe all Anishinaabe girls' identity development.

In addition, there is a limitation on the timing of the data collection. The Talking Back study ran from 2003 to 2006. Since then, the structural, socio-economic, pollical, and community contexts have continued to change. With these evolving contexts, there may be key processes of Anishinaabe girls' identity development in the current time that were not evident in the present study of girls' experiences almost two decades ago.

Pertaining to the methodology, I used inductive thematic analysis to generate common themes that "house" codes, and organized subthemes into domains. I learned from the girls' stories and in the literature that Indigenous ontology-epistemology does not map neatly onto thematic analysis as everything is connected (Chiblow, 2019). In the results, there were two domains of Personal and Relational Self. From an Indigenous perspective, it may be more accurate to place the Personal and Relational Self on a continuum as some codes of the Personal Self had elements of relationality blurring the lines between the Personal and Relational Selves.

Of note, some girls were contradictory in their stories. A lack of consistency in their narrative stories may be linked to disruptions from trauma (Hirshchberger, 2018) or may reflect the girls' developmental level (McKeough & Genereux, 2003). Another reason for the inconsistencies may be that two discrepant perspectives can be true or the inconsistency may have arisen from the girls' hesitancy when disclosing personal events to this research in partnership with Dilico. When the girls were asked questions, the interviewers sometimes provided scaffolding to put the girls at ease. Therefore, leading questions may have pulled for particular responses from the girls. As such, the coders attempted to mitigate leading responses by discarding or not coding any statements that were primarily the interviewers' words.

Research and Clinical Implications

The present research adds to limited research on First Nations adolescent girls' processes of identity development. Derived from the voices of 16 Anishinaabe girls, the three overarching processes of identity development that emerged in this study were Being, Becoming, and Envisioning. The girls' responses reflected the development of both their personal and relational selves, and the important relational influences on their identity development and identity continuity of Being, Becoming, and Envisioning. The literature on identity for cultural differences exaggerated the dichotomy of personal and relational selves "heavily underwritten by Euro-American individualism" (Kirmayer et al., 2018, p. 27). Kirmayer and colleagues (2018) argued this narrow focus falls short of the vast constellation of notions of selfhood for Indigenous peoples. In attempt to fill the gap on the lack of integration of personal and social selves, identity continuity, and a consideration of All My Relations (Wagamese, 2016) in current theories of identity development (Vignoles, 2017), I developed a wholistic model of identity development for Anishinaabe girls (see Figures 7 to 9). It is my hope that this exploratory

research has provided a starting point to understand the pathways that Anishinaabe girls may follow on their developmental journey of identity development.

"Psychology's Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Report" (Canadian Psychological Association [CPA], 2018) indicated that mental health programs should recognize identity and culture that have served as a foundation to strength and resilience since the beginning of Creation. Psychological services should be grounded in a strengths-based model while being cognizant of colonial harms that plague underlying problems and honour choice in the reclamation of cultural identity (CPA, 2018). In further understanding the processes of identity development, the *Relational Determinants of Health* model may aid in the conceptualization to restore critical cultural strengths for the healthy identity development of Indigenous girls (Cardinal & Pepler, 2021). It is imperative to recognize and respect that not all Indigenous youths want to re-connect with culture, or their spirit may not yet be ready. In this research, Anishinaabe girls commented on the importance of their relationships (mothers, fathers, Elders, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunties, uncles, peers, school, culture, and land), as supports for their efforts to shape, honour, and weave together parts of their identity. Despite intergenerational colonial harms, the girls shared stories about coming to understand their responsibilities, gifts, and life purpose created through relationships to form the continuity of ribbons that encircle their own ribbon skirt. Based on the girls' stories and themes that arose in the present study, those in supportive roles, such as psychologists and counsellors, need to adopt a relational and wholistic model in working with Indigenous youth in a culturally responsive way. This approach may involve supporting Indigenous youth to locate, engage with, and contribute to their self-determined meaningful connections to foster personal and collective meaning in their lives (Wexler, 2009a).

Directions for Future Research

This study raises many avenues for future research on identity development of Indigenous girls. The variations of the sense of self based on distinctive ontology-epistemology provides insight to how to support their ways of coping and forward healing (Kirmayer, 2004; Kirmayer et al., 2018). Recognizing the processes of identity formation may lead to fruitful research on identity reclamation and reconstruction as a mechanism of healing and wellness.

There remains a need to understand the intergenerational impact of colonialism on identity formation. Although there were no explicit questions about colonialism in the current study, the girls alluded to detrimental consequences of colonialism in coming to understand themselves. They experienced racism, as well as intergenerational trauma, within their family, school, and community. Some girls were trying to make sense of the impacts of colonial harm in their own lives; for example, recognizing low self-esteem as arising from exposure to parental fighting. Of note, some girls used their negative experiences to construct a positive identity (e.g., who they did not want to be). Conversely, many girls described their lack of understanding of the manifestation of colonial harms in their lives such as violence, substance use, and racism within their families, peers, schools, and communities. Girls commented on what they did not understand: “Why my mom drinks or why people do drugs”, “[Why] People would hit another person, or a person would hit their child”, and “[Why] People can think that people are different just because of their colour of their skin.” The impacts of colonialism also need to be explored in terms of girls’ understanding about themselves. For example, one girl noted: “I just don’t understand why… I hate so much.” It is unclear whether the lack of self-awareness may be attributed to the girls’ cognitive developmental stage, or whether the girls may have not yet learned about the roots of intergenerational trauma and the widespread impact of the trauma on

all Indigenous peoples. There is a need for ongoing research to clarify whether locating oneself and one's struggles within the context of socio-cultural structures, can aid young peoples in making sense of their hardships and locate their trauma experiences in the context of colonialism rather than as arising from personal and collective failure (Wexler, 2009a; Wexler, 2009b). Although research on the impacts of intergenerational harms on families and communities rooted in colonialism is now emerging (Evans-Campbell, 2008); much more research remains to be done to understand the processes of identity formation for Indigenous girls and boys, in light of colonialism.

Conclusion

It is well established that a sense of identity is fundamental to healthy youth development (Ragelienè, 2016; Branje et al., 2021); however the processes of identity development for Indigenous adolescent girls remain understudied. A strong sense of identity could provide the girls with a stabilizing foundation to withstand hardships arising from colonial harms, such as gendered stereotypes and racism (Wexler, 2009a). In this study, I attempted to understand the developmental and relational processes that shape identity development for Indigenous adolescent girls. I listened attentively to the voices of 16 Anishinaabe girls aged 12 to 18 years. The girls faced challenges that helped them decide who they did not want to be and relational support for who they did want to be. Despite the trauma arising from historical and ongoing colonialism, the girls were developing a strong sense of who they were (being), who they were becoming, and who they wanted to be (envisioning). Their views of themselves and the world around them were highly relational, indicating that their healthy identity development depended on the nurturing relationships in which they were growing up. From the coded data (themes, subthemes, and domains), a ribbon skirt analogy was offered in which I depicted the girls'

personal and relational selves, identity continuity, and the spheres of influence (See Figure 7 to 9). In closing, I share the words of wisdom from Jillene Joseph, Executive Director of Native Wellness Institute:

> Our ancestral values continue to exist and evolve through our spirits today. We have seen the resiliency of the Native people throughout colonization, but we must still appreciate, celebrate, and cultivate the indigenous cultures that existed prior to first contact…We honor our ancestors by asking permission to learn of our plight and purpose so that we may continue to follow the Creator's original directions in an ever changing world. We honor our children by taking a long look behind us before taking a step forward. We honor our parents' lineage by treating the body they created with the upmost respect and care. We honor our destiny by using all we know and sacrificing all we have to protect all we love. We acknowledge that our existence in this period of history affirms the harmonious nature in which our heritage asks us to live, so that one day we can share with the future generations and tell them, "That, young sacred spirits, is Native pride." (We R Native, n.d., n.p.).

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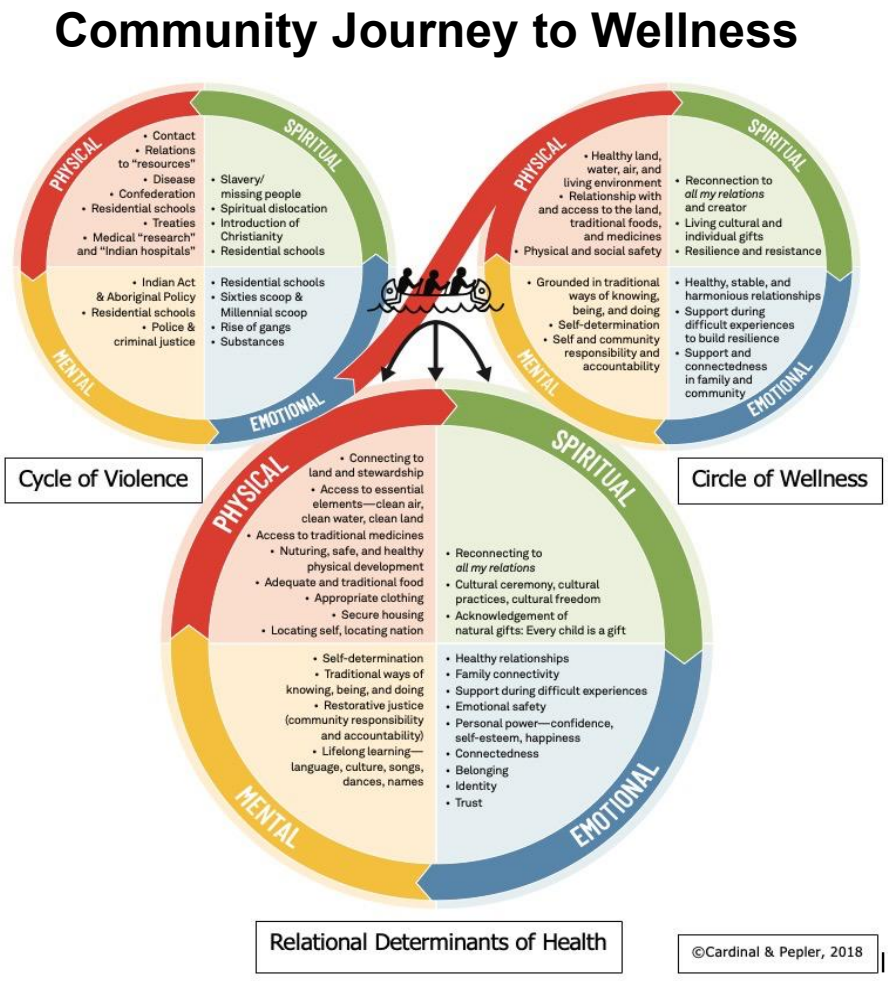
APPENDICES

Appendix A

Cardinal and Pepler's (2021) Community Journey of Change through Relational Determinants of Health Model



Appendix B

Interview Protocol and Semi-Structured Interview Questions

OPENING

GIRLS RIGHTS

We started to notice that more girls were involved in violence, not just doing it, but also receiving it, and we wanted to do something about this. So we decided to do interviews because in order to know what to do to help, we need to know what's going in your minds and lives, and what you think. We want to learn more from girls.

For the next hour I will be asking you to answer some questions about yourself, what you like and don't like; the people in your life; and about your home. It is important for you to know that there are NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. The only thing that matters is what you think, feel, and want to say.

You may not always have an answer for my questions, and that is fine as well. You don't have to. As a matter of fact_____(girl's name), if you can't think of an answer just say: "pass" and at the end of the interview I'll ask again and maybe then you will have an answer, but if you don't that is okay too.

It is important that for you to understand that this interview is completely voluntary. If you do not want to do this interview, you do not have to. Also, if you DO NOT WANT TO ANSWER A QUESTION, just say so "_____(girl's name). If you can't think of an answer or feel uncomfortable answering, just say: "pass". If you want to come back to answer any questions later, you can do that.

If you have any questions while the interview is going on, just ask. How you feel is important.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

When you participate in an interview like this, your answers are not shared with anyone but the other researchers. We will not tell anyone what you said. What will happen is that your ideas will be mixed together with the other girls' ideas.

The only time we have to tell someone what you said, is if we feel your health and safety or someone else's health and safety may be in danger. This means that according to the law, if you tell us that you have been hurt or abused or if you tell us that you or someone else is about to be hurt, we have to report it so that someone can help.

FORMAT:

As I said before, I am here to listen to your stories. To start, I will be asking you questions about you, who is important to you, your home, where you learn, and other things that might be important to you. Asking questions helps us to understand your story in one way, but to learn even more, I will also ask you to FINISH SENTENCES that I start. So basically, I will sometimes say something like "I like it when…" and ask you to finish the sentence. For example: "I like it when I get to spend time with my dog." Again, there are no RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. The only thing that matters is what you think, feel, and want to say.

The first questions are about you.

SELF

1) What are three words you would use to describe yourself?

For the next question I will give you a sentence completion question. I start with the sentence and you finish it. Say the first thing that comes out.

2) I love it when I …

3) If you could change three things about yourself, what would you change? Why?
4) What makes you happy?
5) What makes you angry?
6) How do you deal with your anger?
7) What makes you sad?

Finish the next set of sentences for me.

8) I wish that I could…
9) I just do not understand why…
10) I am really good at…
11) I am most afraid that…
12) I never know what to do when …
13) The best thing that ever happened to was...
14) The worst thing that ever happened to me was…
15) Just once I would like it if …

SPECIAL PLACE

16) Tell me about one place, any place that you go to that you consider special? Why?

AS A CHILD

Finish the next few sentences for me.

17) When I was 7 I remember I would always …
18) The thing I remember best about being little…
19) The thing I like least about being little….

AS A LEARNER

20) Tell me about a book/movie/story that you have seen/heard?
21) Some of us do well in school some of us do poorly. But whether we do well or not, really does not tell much about how smart a person is. This is not about school smart, but smart in general, sort of like street smart. How smart are you and how do you know that?
22) Tell me something that happens at school that you really like.
23) Tell me about something that happens at school that you do not like.
24) Tell me about the person you learn the most from.
25) Do you have a favourite school subject? If so, what is your favourite school subject? If so, what do you like best about your favourite school subject?

26) Have you ever been involved in something or seen something that has changed the way you behave with people or feel around people?

GOALS

27) What is something that you want to do someday?

PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE

28) Is there someone in your life who makes you feel good about yourself? If so, who?
29) Tell me about one person you like to spend time with?
30) What does it mean for a girl to have a romantic partner?
31) Do you have a romantic partner? Or have you ever had a romantic partner?
32) If so, do you want to tell me about that person?
33) What qualities do you look for in a romantic partner?
34) If you could change one person in your life, who is that person, and what would you change?
35) When something really good happens to you, who do you tell?
36) When you are in trouble, who do you go ask for help?
37) What is it about that person that makes him or her someone you turn to?
38) Have ever participated in something that you won't do alone? If so, what? Finish the next few sentences for me.
39) The person I most admire is…
40) I admire her or him because…
41) The worst thing a friend ever did to me was…

HOME (Family & Community)

42) Where do you live?
43) Who lives with you?
44) Have you always lived there? If not, where else? With who else?
45) Tell me what you like the best and/or what you like the least about where you live.
46) If you could change one thing about where you live, what would it be?

Finish the next few sentences for me.

47) The best thing my family ever did for me was…
48) I can never make my family understand why…….
49) My mother is…
50) My father is…
51) When someone asks "Where are you from?" How do you feel telling the person you are from_____. Why do you think that is?
52) If you could teach or tell your little sisters, cousins one thing what would you teach them?

BEING A GIRL

53) Sometimes boys get more opportunities than girls. What do girls not get? What do girls want?
54) Are there any opportunities that girls get that boys don't get?

HOW DO THEY FEEL ABOUT THIS INTERVIEW?

55) We are doing these interviewers because we want to hear your stories and learn from them. How do you feel about being asked these questions and being asked to tell your stories?

56) Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?

CLOSING

"Thank you for helping us and sharing your thoughts, knowledge, and experiences. At the moment myself and another interviewer are doing interviews, but once I get the chance, I will go through your interview with the other interviewer and look at what key points came out of this interview. An example of a key point might be that you have a good friend that you can trust. Once I have done this, would you like me to contact you and we can meet again and go over these key points? By doing this you can tell me if you think I was correct or if you would like to add something. "

If yes: "I should be contacting you within the next 3 months. Is it still okay to call you at this telephone number?"

End: Give the girl your business card and state: " If in a week or so you decide that you want to tell me something that you may have forgotten to say now, please feel free to leave a message on this telephone number. But remember I am not a counselor, but a researcher.

Appendix C

Map of Dilico

Figure from Dilico Anishinabek Family Care (2017).

Appendix D

Primary Theme of Being: Frequency of Codes, Girls Commented, and Coded Comments

Being Domains	Subthemes	Number of codes	Number of girls commenting	Frequency of comments coded
Personal self	Personal characteristics	7	8	20
	Developmental changes	4	6	13
	Desire for autonomy	4	6	17
	Body image	2	5	9
	Values	6	17	97
	Standards	4	8	71
Relational self	Relational characteristics	6	9	22
	Protecting self-image	2	4	5
	Social engagement	5	12	20
	Social role	5	10	17
Influences on identity development	Who influences her being	6	15	104
	How she feels about herself in relationships	5	12	101

Note: The total number of commented coded in the primary theme of Being is 496.

Appendix E

Primary Theme of Becoming: Frequency of Codes, Girls Commented, and Coded Comments

Becoming Domains	Subthemes	Number of codes	Number of girls commenting	Frequency of comments coded
Personal self	Self-coping strategies	5	13	39
	Individual processes of learning	2	12	32
	What she is learning	3	8	9
Relational self	Social processes of learning	4	13	56
	What she is learning from others	6	15	60
Influences on identity development	Who influences her becoming	7	16	109
	Who to turn to and not turn to for support	6	14	52

Note: The total number of commented codes in the primary theme of Becoming is 357.

Appendix F

Primary Theme of Envisioning: Frequency of Codes, Girls Commented, and Coded Comments

Envisioning Domains	Subthemes	Number of codes	Number of girls commenting	Frequency of comments coded
Personal self	Envisioning of future individual self	6	15	67
	Individual fears	3	4	7
Relational self	Envisioning a future relational self	5	12	40
	Admiration	4	11	39
	Values for leading a good life	6	7	23
	Hope for family, friends, and community	10	14	69
	Relational fears	4	11	17
Influences on identity development	Who influences her envisioning	2	2	3

Note: The total number of coded comments in the primary theme of Envisioning is 265.